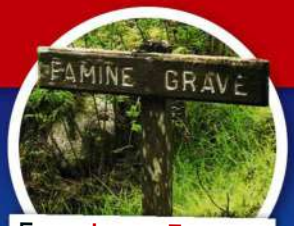
YOUR **FAMILY HISTORY** QUESTIONS ANSWERED

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING FAMILY HISTORY MAGAZINE

ISSUE 232 JULY 2025 £5.75

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?®

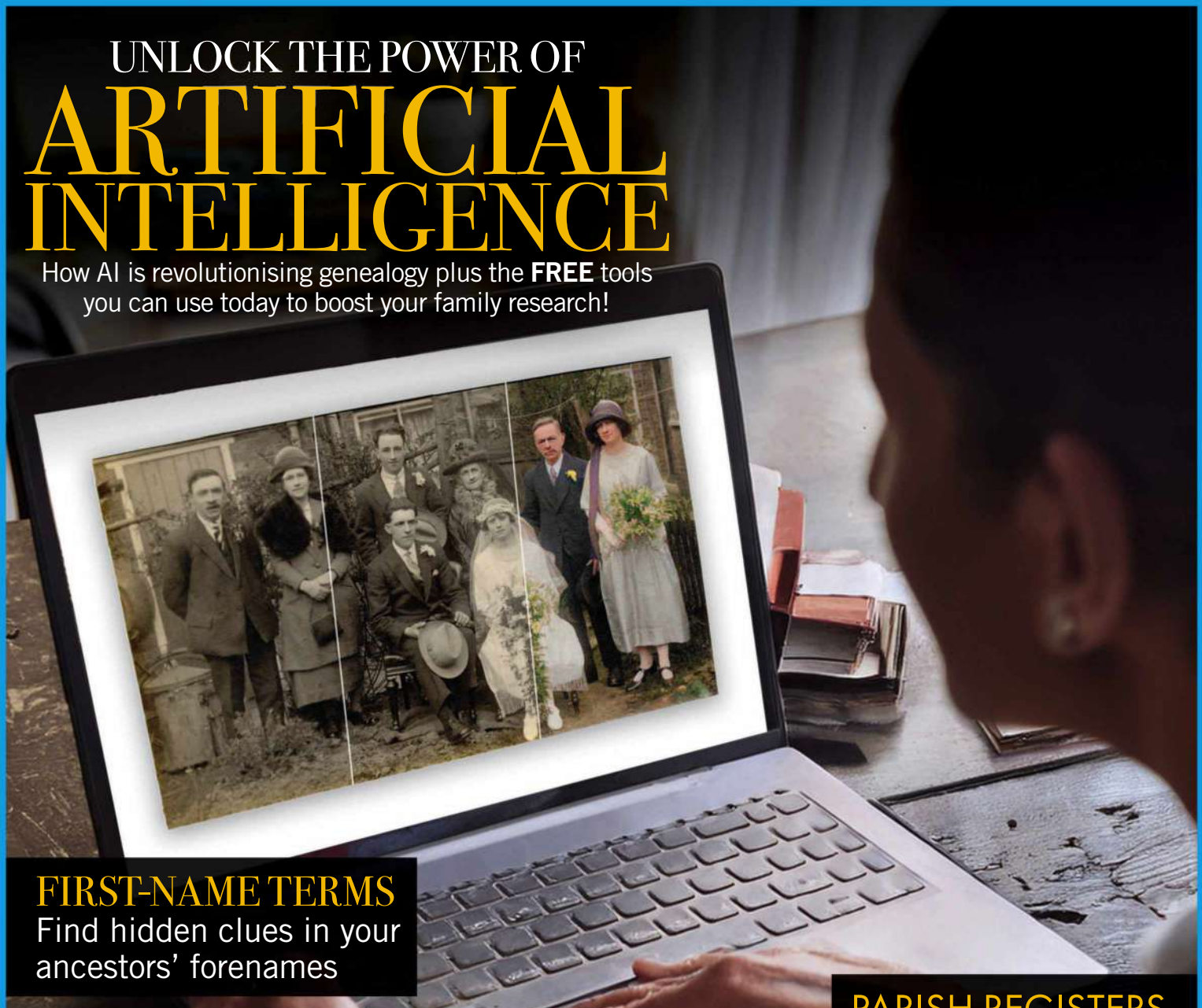


FIND IRISH FAMINE RECORDS ONLINE

UNLOCK THE POWER OF

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

How AI is revolutionising genealogy plus the **FREE** tools you can use today to boost your family research!



FIRST-NAME TERMS

Find hidden clues in your ancestors' forenames

PARISH REGISTERS

Avoid the pitfalls of 18th-century records

I picked up the family history baton 20 years after Mum died

The Scottish paternity records that revealed Diane Morgan's kin

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- The golden age of **motoring**
- A **London** estate book from 1800
- A guide to **Berkshire** research

ancestry | In partnership with Historic England

Nominate a 20th century female ancestor for a National Blue Plaque

© Hulton Archives/Getty Images and Historic England Archive

Do you have an important female ancestor who lived in England in the 1920s and made a significant contribution to history and whose achievements have not been recognised?

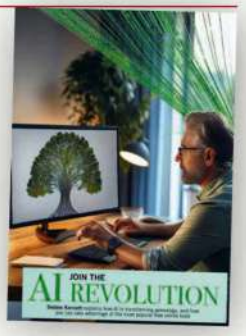
Ancestry and Historic England are looking for nominations from across England to celebrate the achievements of women from the 20th century. Nominate your ancestor or just a female in the 1921 Census you believe is deserving of a National Blue Plaque.

Nominate your family member by 10 July 2025.
To find out more, visit https://www.ancestry.co.uk/historic-england-2025
or use the QR code

Welcome

Sarah's Top Tip

Avoid ChatGPT's 'hallucinations' with Alaric's tip in our 'Letters' section



Since we are looking at how to use AI this month, I wanted to thank Alaric Evans for his ChatGPT tip shared on **page 7**. As he says, ChatGPT can sometimes make things up, or 'hallucinate'. To avoid this, it helps to give the tool as much information as possible so that it is just focusing on the precise information you are missing. Reading wills can be a tricky business and I'm intrigued by how AI is being used, not just by Alaric but also by the University of Exeter in its project to transcribe the Prerogative Court of Canterbury wills at The National Archives. Find out more in our AI feature (**page 14**).

I know I'm not alone in being nervous about the astronomical speed with which artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming a part of our lives (whether we realise it or not). But it's also exciting. This technology will enable us to do new things (and old things) faster and better than ever before. As Debbie Kennett says in her article on **page 14** the tools are improving and changing all the time, so this month we want to inspire you to try some out. Do tell us how you get on.

This month, I also share my interest in forenames (**page 19**). Over the years of working on this magazine, I've heard lots of stories about the strange names that parents give their children. Hopefully more will land in my inbox now. I always enjoy a chuckle.

And on **page 28** we've got Paul Blake talking about using parish registers to get beyond civil registration. Without the anchor of the census, you can find yourself going down the wrong path and researching completely unrelated families, so his advice is vital!

Finally, I hope you enjoyed the latest series of *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Scottish genealogist Emma Maxwell was a researcher for actor Diane Morgan's story, and appeared in the episode. Emma shares her tips for researching Scottish paternity cases on **page 38**, and as always we've got lots of advice on our website to tie in with the series plus summaries of all of the episodes. Happy hunting!

Sarah

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Contributors

Debbie Kennett

Debbie regularly writes for us on DNA topics and one-name studies, but this month she turns her attention to AI and how we can use some of the latest free online tools (**page 14**).

Paul Blake

Paul is a regular contributor to the magazine, with over 30 years' experience in the world of family history. On **page 28** he shares some tips on using parish registers.

Simon Fowler

Simon is a genealogist, tutor, speak and author as well as a regular contributor. This month, on **page 56**, he shares his passion for old cars and the golden age of driving.

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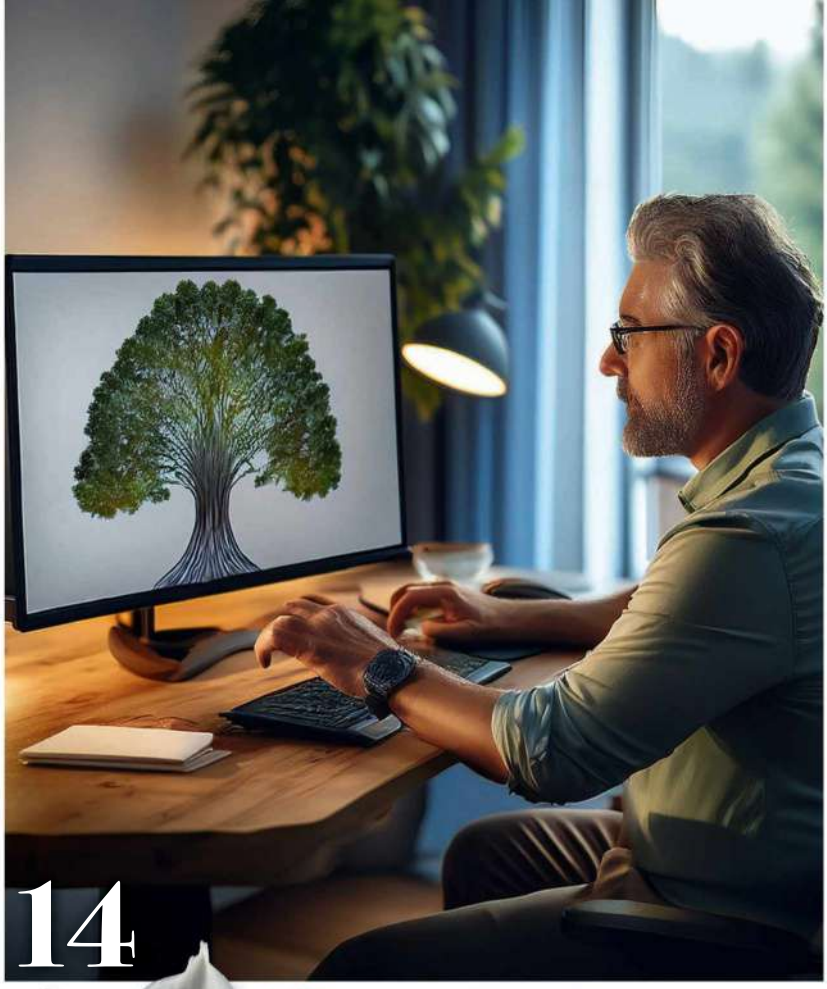

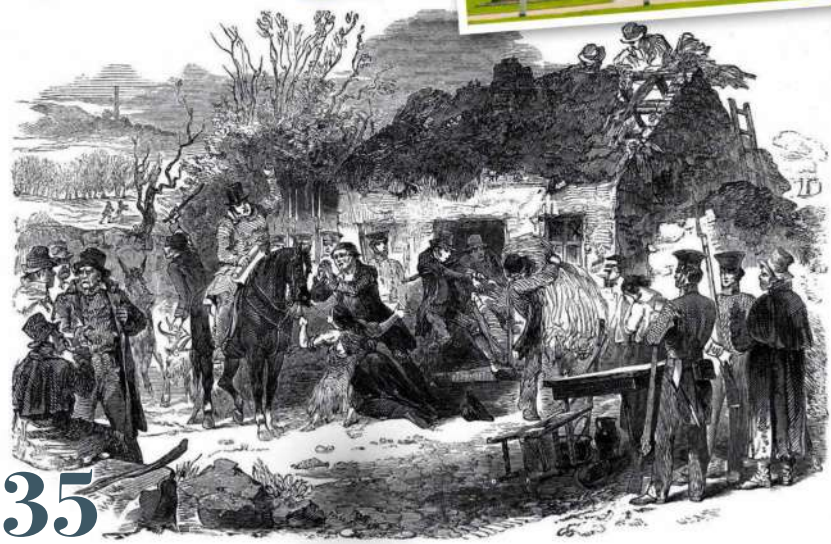

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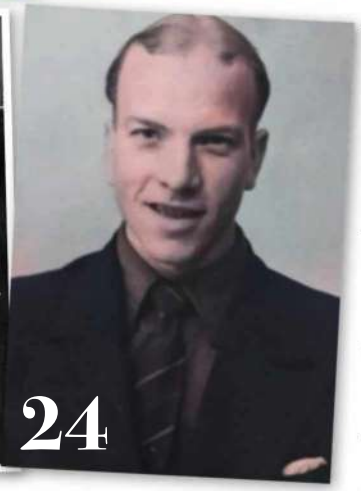

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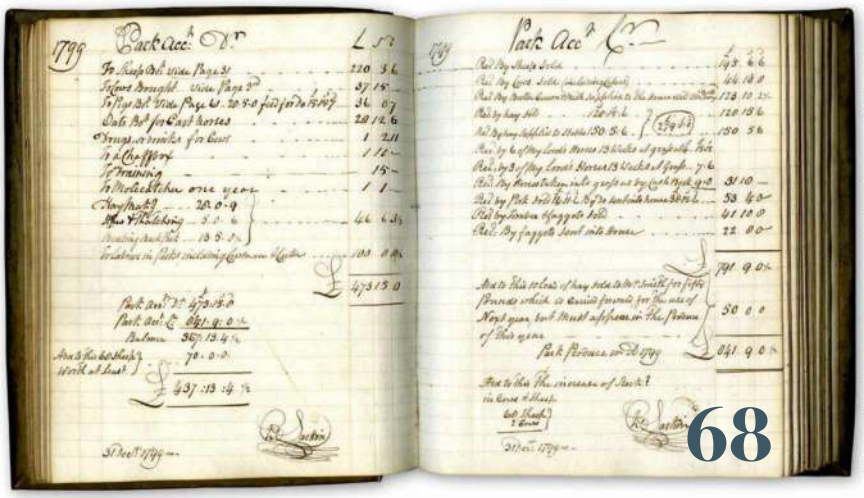

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Write to *WDYTYA? Magazine*, Eagle House, Bristol BS1 4ST

WIN an AncestryDNA test kit from **ancestry.co.uk**
WORTH £79

The writer of our star letter wins an AncestryDNA test **worth £79** – so drop us a line and share your thoughts with us.

The Roma Holocaust

STAR LETTER

Anna Maria 'Settela' Steinbach, one of the many Roma who were murdered by the Nazis

In actor Andrew Garfield's *Who Do You Think You Are?* episode he made the sad discovery that three of his great grandfather's sisters were murdered in the Treblinka extermination camp. A number of photographs and video clips were used to illustrate the Holocaust, and one of them was of a frightened young girl peering between the partly open doors of a cattle truck.

This was a still from a well-known film of Dutch Jews boarding a transport to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp, and for 50 years it was thought that this "girl in the headscarf" was Jewish. Remarkably, in the 1990s a Dutch journalist called Aad Wagenaar identified that the transport had taken place on 19 May 1944 and found a Sinti (Gypsy) lady who had been in the same wagon and survived. She identified the girl as a nine-year-old Sinti called Anna Maria 'Settela' Steinbach. Settela, her mother, two brothers, two sisters, her aunt, two nephews and a niece were all gassed; only her father survived. It has been estimated that the total number of Roma murdered could have been as high as 1.5 million, and the EU has designated 2 August as the annual European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day.

A colourised version of the film the still was taken from can be seen on YouTube at **tinyurl.com/yt-wagenaar** via the channel 'Nineteenth Century Videos. Back to Life'.

Ron Gardner, Great Alne, Warwickshire

The total number of Roma murdered could have been as high as 1.5 million

Editor Replies **Thanks Ron, you inspired me to find out more about Wagenaar's research into Settela. Naming Holocaust victims is a crucial act of remembrance that I know will resonate with our readers.**

Civil-War Resource

I appreciated the 'Best Websites' article in the May issue about the English Civil War, and just thought that readers might like to know about another source.

The Warwickshire Civil War Loss Accounts have been transcribed by volunteers, and there is a database too. The information available is very name-rich – a great potential source for researchers seeking ancestors who were living in Warwickshire during the Civil War. I was one of the volunteer transcribers, and thoroughly enjoyed the project. You can find out more about the project and the database via **heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk/civilwaraccounts**. It's a wonderful resource for family historians – highly recommended!

Lesley Plant, Kenilworth

Editor Replies **Thank you for writing in Lesley and pulling us up on that omission. It's particularly remiss considering that we have featured the project in the magazine previously.**

Lesley got in touch to remind us about this fantastic online database that reveals the financial losses suffered by Warwickshire inhabitants in the English Civil War

Milly Calverley Rowland saw Layton William's episode
Beautiful episode. So many interesting stories and I loved what Layton said about the resilience of his family.

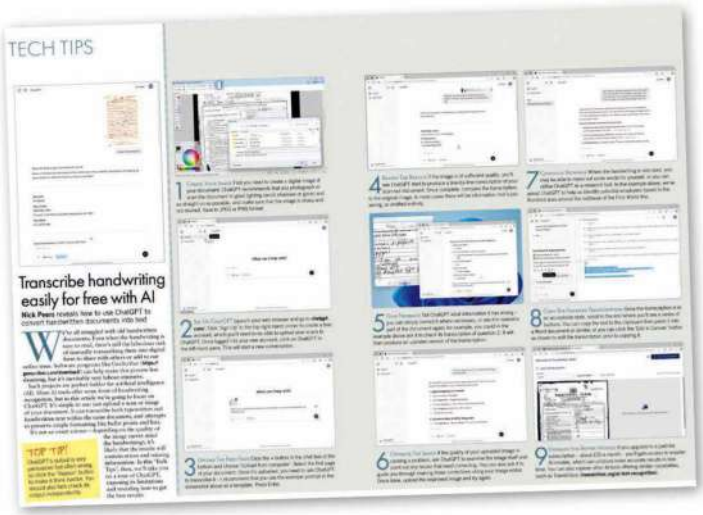
ChatGPT Tip

Thank you for Nick Peers' invaluable 'Tech Tips' article on using ChatGPT to transcribe documents in the May issue. I have found that the tool will often swerve off course and 'hallucinate' believable but fundamentally incorrect transcriptions, probably based on its reading of other documents (in this case wills). I have found the best way of providing feedback is to use the transcription it provides, correct it as far as possible and then feed it back once corrected with a prompt such as: "This is a page from a will of 1806. Below is a transcription but some words are unknown and shown as xxxx. Can you please complete this transcription: 'executors or administrators to pay the xxxx dividends and annual profits of the other moiety or half part thereof when and as the same shall from time to time grow xxxx and be xxxx'."

This approach seems to keep the transcription on track, and focused on the words I can't read.

Alaric Evans, London

Editor Replies **That's great advice Alaric. I've experienced my own 'hallucinations' when using ChatGPT, so this tip looks very helpful. I hope you enjoy our feature on AI this month.**



May's 'Tech Tips' inspired Alaric to share his tip for using ChatGPT to transcribe

Mobile Ancestors

My great grandparents Mary Ann Northorp and James Duffus (a carpenter and joiner by trade) lived for most of their married life in the Stepney/Bow area of London. The relevant censuses, and the birth and marriage certificates of their seven children who made it to adulthood, provide a large number of data points to record their addresses.

These data points show that, during the first 30 years after their marriage in 1862, they moved at least eight times, giving an average sojourn of less than four years per house.

The obvious reasons for moving, such as changing jobs, or midnight flits to avoid the rent collector, do not seem to explain this frequency. This is because, so far as I can tell using the 1882 Post Office London Directory and Booth's Poverty Map (which do not allow accurate location of all of them), these addresses are almost all within easy walking distance of each other.

Nor do the actual addresses suggest that they were seeking a larger house to accommodate a growing family.

So, was this frequency a common feature among the East London working class?

Incidentally, I note that Della Judd's Star Letter in the May issue referred to "bomb-damage maps". However, the Bomb Sight website **bombsight.org** does not seem to be working properly. Perhaps you could talk to the organisers.

Robin M White, Dundee

Editor Replies **Moving house was relatively common in cities during this period. With fewer possessions than we have nowadays, and much less home ownership, it was very easy for a family to move if they felt a house wasn't being properly maintained by the landlord, or a house came up that was a better offer, or their neighbours proved to be insufferable.**

As for the Bomb Sight website, it hasn't worked for some time. However, the maps are now available on Layers of London which is a great site to explore: layersoflondon.org/map/overlays/bomb-damage-1945**.**

Han Ilarious Hanecdote

I've just read 'Sarah's Top Tip' on the 'Welcome' page of the June issue [about East Londoners adding and removing the letter 'h' from the start of words], and was instantly reminded of a story about the announcer at Paddington Station some years ago. He was renowned for advising passengers that "The train at Platform 8 is for Hacton, Healing Broadway, West Healing, Anwell and Helthorne, Southall, Ayes" and so on.

John Craig, by email

Editor Replies **This made me 'owl with laughter, John.**

The people of Portsmouth work with the Royal Navy to clear the debris left by an air raid during the Second World War

▶ WW2 Memories

As I rapidly approach my 83rd birthday on 2 June, and with the frequent mention of the end of the Second World War, I cast my mind back to May 1945.

Being a month short of my third birthday when the end of the war was declared, it is difficult to remember much of the first few years of my childhood, but a few events in particular have never left me. When war was declared at the beginning of September 1939, my father, Terence George Harry Stephens, had just turned 19. He would have been ripe for a call-up, but his profession was a reserved occupation for the war effort, due to the fact that he was a universal grinder in an engineering factory in the city of Portsmouth. However, I have never been able to find him in the 1939 Register! Was he deliberately left out by his parents (Harry and Louise Stephens) for fear that he might have to fight?

His father had been in the Indian Army from 1906 to 1937. When he retired and returned to England, he bought a house at 42 Northern Parade, North End, Portsmouth. The 1939 Register shows my grandparents and their younger son, but no sign of Dad. He later joined the Home Guard and was on anti-aircraft duty in Alexander Park, which was on the other side of Northern Parade. Due to the fact that Portsmouth is a naval city, it was heavily bombed, so the factory where Dad worked, J Evans & Son, in Goldsmith Avenue, was moved to Frome in Somerset, and I was born near there in 1942. After Adolf stopped the air raids, the factory returned to Pompey (our local name for Portsmouth).

Two of my memories of the war are of being in air-raid shelters. One shelter was in Randolph Road, Portsmouth, where one of Mum's sisters had a house, and I remember I had a gas mask in the shape of Mickey Mouse.

Another, more vivid memory involves being whipped out of bed by my mother at the Northern Parade house, crying as I was carried down the garden path and into the shed, where there were steps down into a shelter.

The end of the war came and I remember a street party in Gladys Avenue, which was off Northern Parade. I have never been much of a party animal, and can remember I didn't want to go to the street party, as I probably didn't understand what all the fuss was about.

Terry Stephens, Edgbaston, Birmingham

Editor Replies Thanks Terry. Some parents did leave off young sons, but soon changed their tune when they realised that they wouldn't get a ration card without being registered!

@charlesmossman.bsky.social shared his thoughts on Aisling Bea's episode of *WDYTYA?*
Fascinating episode where Aisling Bea discovers things about her family that make her proud but also a bit ashamed.

YOUR LETTER IN PRINT We reserve the right to edit any letters sent to the magazine. Messages posted to our Facebook wall and tweets sent to us may also appear in print. The choice of Star Letter is the editor's and the prize is subject to change.

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What's On

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PICK OF THE MONTH

Don't miss this online event on Romany and Traveller heritage

Researching Romany And Traveller Ancestors In Conjunction With R&TFHS

23 June

w **tinyurl.com/sog-researching-romany**

A Gypsy camp in Epsom, c1930

Have you ever wondered if you have Romany, Gypsy or Traveller roots? In this event from the Society of Genealogists and the Romany and Traveller Family History Society, you can learn how to research nomadic ancestors from a series of expert speakers. Discover how to find licences for hawkers and chimney sweeps, police records, newspaper reports and rare archival collections. You will also learn about the records of the Gypsy Lore Society (1888–1974) and explore the evocative photographs of Fred Shaw, held at the University of Liverpool. Plus, uncover unique insights from the National Fairground and Circus Archive. Free; available to watch on YouTube afterwards.

IN PERSON

Trade Roots

Until 30 September

a **Jersey Museum, St Helier**

t 01534 633300

w **jerseyheritage.org/visit/whats-on/trade-roots/**

This exhibition explores evidence of Jersey's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. Free.

Col. JR Dodd RAMC – A Surgeon With A Very Interesting History

17 June

a **St George's Church Hall, Poole**

t 01202 785623

w **tinyurl.com/dorsetfhs-dodd-limburn**

In this Dorset Family History Society event, Steve Limburn from the Bournemouth Natural Science Society & Museum will tell the story behind the uniform and walking stick that were given to his father many years ago by an army surgeon who had led a very interesting life. £3.

History Of The World As Seen Through My Family Library

17 June

a **Nursteed Centre, Devizes**

t 01380 723191

w **wiltshirefhs.co.uk/devizes-branch**

JJ Heath-Caldwell will discuss the library of Linley Wood, the ancestral home of the Caldwell family, at this Wiltshire Family History Society event. Free.

Where There Is A Will There Is A Way – An Introduction To Probate Records

20 June

a **The Hold, Ipswich**

t 01473 296666

w **tinyurl.com/ticket-source-hold-probate**

This workshop at the home of Suffolk Archives will focus on probate records as a source for local and family history. £15.

Emigration To Australia In The Mid 19th Century

5 July

a **Dartford Science and Technology College**

t 01322 527604

w **tinyurl.com/nwkfhs-emigration-australia**

Historian Bill Lindsay will talk about emigrants to Australia, the conditions they endured aboard ship and what they experienced when they arrived. Free to North West Kent Family History Society members, non-members are asked for a small donation.

Discovery Saturday: The Second World War

12 July

a **Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton**

t 01823 278805

w **tinyurl.com/swht-second-world**

Discover records of the Second World War in Somerset's archives, and how to research your kin, at this drop-in event. Free.

IN PERSON & ONLINE

Revealing The Town And Its People: Bolton's First Parish Register 1573–1661

2 July

a **Great Lever & Farnworth Golf Club, Bolton**

w **mlfhs.uk/bolton/events/meetings**

This talk from *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* contributor Alan Crosby will explore the information in Bolton's first parish register. Free to Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society members, £5 for non-members.

ONLINE

Highlands And Islands Family History

17 June

w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-nls-highlands**

This workshop will teach you how to research forebears from the Highlands and Islands at the National Library of Scotland. Free.

More Than Just Names On A Page

18 June

w **chfhs.org.uk/more-than-just-names-on-a-page-with-debbie-bradley-492**

At this Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Family History Society event Debbie Bradley shares resources to find out about your ancestors' daily lives. Free.

Family History: Tracing Your Irish Ancestors

20 June

w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-tna-irish-ancestors**

Jessamy Carlson of The National Archives at Kew and Brian Gurrin from Trinity College Dublin will explain how to use the records in the Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland (**virtualtreasury.ie**). Free.

Criminal Courts Before 1971

24 June

w **tinyurl.com/berksfhs-criminal-courts-1971**

Sarah Pettyfer's webinar will reveal how the criminal-court system developed, the main courts involved, and the records that are available and where to find them. Free to members of Berkshire Family History Society, £5 for non-members.

BOOK AHEAD

Learn about impoverished relations with this online course

Recording The Poor – From Parish To Workhouse And Beyond

Starts 21 July

w **pharostutors.com/recording-the-poor-from-parish-to-workhouse-and-beyond**

In this four-week course from Pharos Tutors, *WDYTYA? Magazine* contributor Simon Fowler will teach you how to trace the historic poor, and will explain the Poor Law before and after 1834 as well as the surviving records. £85 with an assessment or £63 without.

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News

Rosemary Collins reports on the latest data releases and genealogy news

23andMe is based in Mountain View, California, USA

US biotechnology company to purchase 23andMe

Regeneron Pharmaceuticals (regeneron.com), a human-genetics and biotech company based in the USA, announced on 19 May that it will purchase troubled US DNA-testing company 23andMe (23andme.com) for $256 million.

23andMe announced it was filing for bankruptcy in March.

The firm had seen its share price plummet since it went public in February 2021. It also suffered a major data breach in October 2023, when hackers breached about 14,000 customers' accounts, gaining access to the data of 6.9 million people. In September 2024, 23andMe agreed to pay $30 million to settle a class-action lawsuit by affected customers.

23andMe said that the sale agreement included Regeneron's commitment to comply with 23andMe's privacy policies and applicable laws regarding customers' personal data.

A court-appointed, independent consumer privacy ombudsman will also examine the purchase and the impact, if any, on consumers' privacy.

Mark Jensen, chair and member of the special committee of the board of directors of 23andMe, commented, "We are pleased to have reached a transaction that maximises the value of the business and enables the mission of 23andMe to live on, while maintaining critical protections around customer privacy, choice and consent with respect to their genetic data."

George D Yancopoulos, president and chief scientific officer of Regeneron, said, "We assure 23andMe customers that we will apply our high standards for safety and integrity to their data and ongoing consumer genetic services."

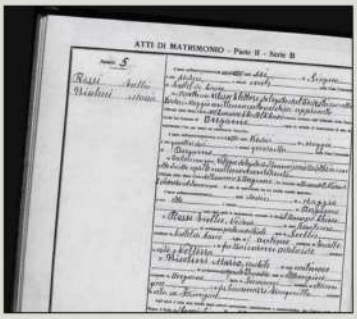
Genetic-genealogy expert Debbie Kennett told *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine*, "23andMe was set up with the aim of improving healthcare, preventing disease, and accelerating research by leveraging the power of its large database, but has never made a profit. Regeneron on the other hand is a large company with a proven track record of drug development, so I would hope that the firm will be able to revitalise the business. Eighty per cent of 23andMe customers have actively elected to participate in research, and if customers feel able to put their trust in the new owners then this high opt-in rate will continue.

"Also, it seems highly likely to me that Regeneron will want to expand the genealogy and ancestry services and features in order to grow the database and make more discoveries.

"If anyone is worried about insurance companies accessing their data, the Association of British Insurers (ABI) has a Code on Genetic Testing and Insurance which means that predictive tests such as 23andMe's cannot be used for insurance purposes."

GETTY IMAGES

NEWS IN BRIEF



The record of a 1930 marriage in Bologna

FamilySearch expands its collections from Italy

Free family history site FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) has made a major upgrade to its civil birth, marriage and death registration records from Italy, transcribed by volunteers. In total, 33,758,130 records have been added to 83 collections. The record sets cover all parts of the country, including Genoa, Bologna, Naples, Sicily, Milan, Rome and Venice. Some of the records date back as far as the 16th and 17th centuries, with the most recent covering 1955.

The archives team at the Town House

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives reopens to the public

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives (**tinyurl.com/aberdeen-arch**) reopened on 29 April. The archive was closed for almost a year ahead of the move from Old Aberdeen House to the Town House on Broad Street, and more than 9,000 archive boxes and individual items were transferred over 20 days. The archive is open Tuesday to Friday, 9.30am–12.30pm and 1.30pm–4.30pm. Appointments must be made in advance by email (*archives@aberdeencity.gov.uk*).

Lombard Street in Hull following a raid in May 1941

MP calls for TNA to publish 1942 report into the Hull Blitz

A Hull MP has called on The National Archives (TNA; nationalarchives.gov.uk) at Kew to publish a report into the bombing suffered by the city during the Second World War.

In a letter written to TNA on 1 May, also published on X (formerly Twitter; **x.com**), Dame Diana Johnson, MP for Kingston upon Hull North and Cottingham, said that a report into the effects of bombing on the city between 1940 and 1941 was prepared by Solly Zuckerman and JD Bernal, government scientific advisers, in 1942.

Publication of the report was embargoed until 2020, but the embargo was then extended indefinitely.

Dame Johnson called on TNA to either explain why the embargo was extended or publish the report.

Johnson said, "As one of Hull's MPs and having served six years as a member of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, I know that it is important to remember the suffering, loss and sacrifice of Hull civilians."

At least 1,200 people are thought to have been killed in the Hull Blitz.

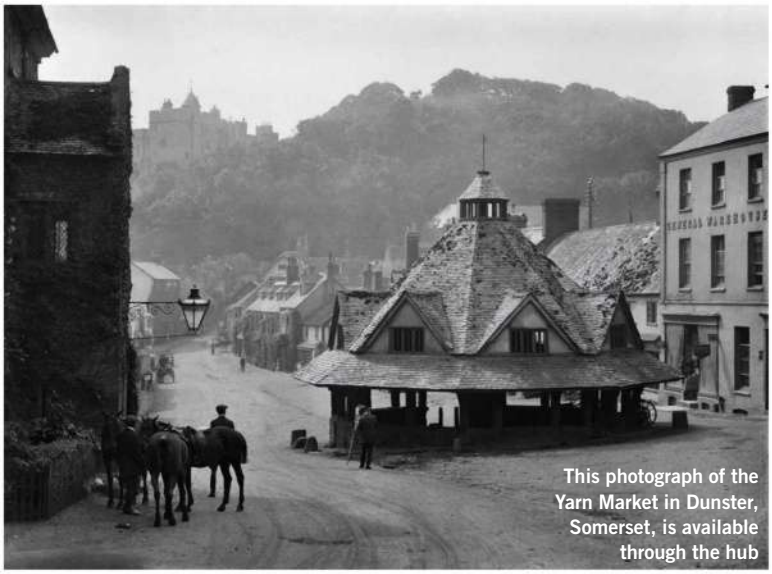
A spokesperson for TNA told *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine*, "We have asked Dame Diana's parliamentary office for clarification regarding the records she referenced in her letter. While we wait for that information our records specialists are looking into the issues she raised."

CAN YOU HELP?

Genealogical records website Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has teamed up with Historic England (**historicengland.org.uk**) to commemorate more women through the National Blue Plaque Scheme, and wants members of the public to nominate their ancestors. To be eligible, your forebear must be a woman or girl who is likely to appear in the 1921 census for England and Wales; must have died at least 20 years ago; must have made a significant contribution to human welfare or happiness in her field, community or society; and must have a building in England associated with her where the plaque can go. The news comes after Historic England and Ancestry unveiled a blue plaque in Bradford commemorating actor and theatre director Esmé Church (1893–1972). You can nominate your ancestor at **ancestry.co.uk/c/historic-england-2025**.

Esmé Church's new plaque

GETTY IMAGES | ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL (ARCHIVES, GALLERY & MUSEUMS) | HISTORIC ENGLAND



This photograph of the Yarn Market in Dunster, Somerset, is available through the hub

Online Local Heritage Hub helps people 'explore hidden histories'

Historic England (historicengland.org.uk) has launched a free searchable Local Heritage Hub online.

The hub contains nearly 400 pages, covering every county, city, district and major town in England.

Each page links to material about the local area on Historic England's site, including information about listed buildings and places; articles; historic photographs; documents; videos; and podcasts.

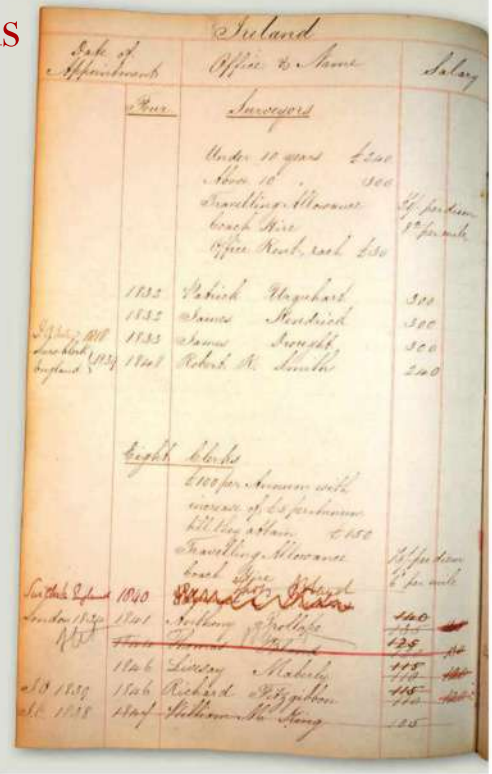
"Understanding and connecting with local heritage is an important part of building strong communities," commented Duncan Wilson, the organisation's chief executive.

"With this new service, we hope people across England will be able to explore hidden histories, reconnect with their surroundings, and feel a sense of pride in their local area."

To access the online hub, visit **historicengland.org.uk/local** and search for a postcode or place.

Ancestry adds over one million Post Office records

Family history website Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has added a set of postal establishment books from the British Post Office. They contain 1,655,863 employment records, particularly high-ranking clerical staff. They date from 1691–1979, but most of the records cover the 19th century. They include novelist Anthony Trollope, who was hired as a clerk with a salary of £100 per annum in Ireland in 1841. The original records are preserved by The Postal Museum in London (**postalmuseum.org**).



The new collection includes a record of Anthony Trollope

6
The number of possible living relations of Leonardo da Vinci discovered using DNA (**tinyurl.com/ifl-sci-leo**)

103,545
The number of Salisbury Infirmary hospital records (1797–1832) that have been added to **findmypast.co.uk**

Magna Carta
The version belonging to Harvard University has been identified as an original not a copy (**tinyurl.com/guard-mc**)

164,524
The number of Lloyd George Domesday Survey records for Cambridgeshire that have been added to **the genealogist.co.uk**

Leo XIV
The new Pope is descended from Creole people of colour in New Orleans (**tinyurl.com/nyt-leo**)

VE Day
Relatives of people filmed celebrating in Gateshead in 1945 have met up (**tinyurl.com/bbc-ve-gates**)

This map of military operations during the Jacobite Rising is now on NLS's website

NLS adds historic maps to free site

The National Library of Scotland (NLS; nls.uk) has published a new collection of 137 historic maps of England, Wales, Ireland and overseas on its free website maps.nls.uk.

The original maps are held by the Society of Writers to His Majesty's Signet (**wssociety.co.uk**), a private society of Scottish solicitors in Edinburgh.

The NLS digitised a set of 402 Signet Library maps of Scotland five years ago.

The additions include 20 Ordnance Survey one-inch-to-the-mile Old Series maps of England and Wales.

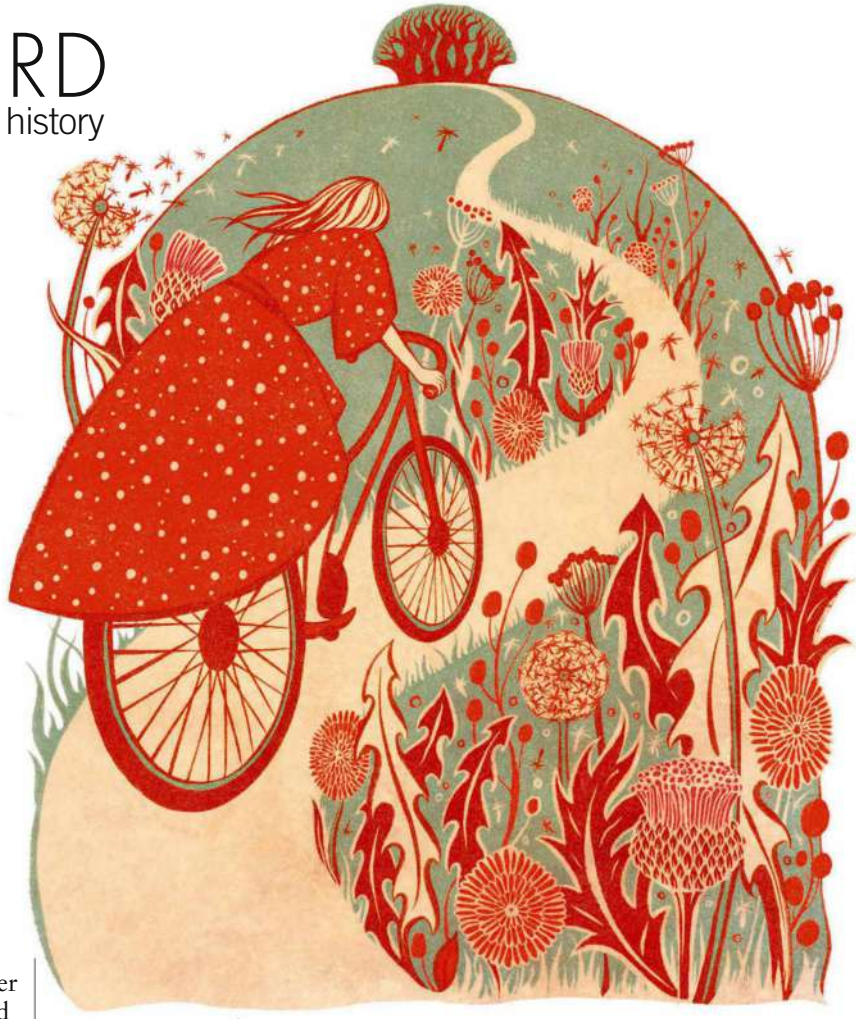
Other maps include Taylor's 1816 two-inch-to-the-mile map of Dublin and its environs; Bye and Purdy's 1813 map of the harbours and islands in the British Channel; and a 1751 map of Great Britain that illustrates military operations of the Jacobite Rising of 1745–1746 and the secret routes of Prince Charles, or 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', after he escaped the Battle of Culloden (1746).

The international maps, meanwhile, include a 1645 map of the Arctic; an 1857 map of Delhi; and an 1802 plan of the movements of British and Ottoman forces fighting the French in Egypt in 1801.

HISTORIC ENGLAND ARCHIVE

Powering Through

Alan Crosby celebrates a group of women who were all born in the 19th century



A friend was telling me about her grandmother, who was born in 1897 in Cumberland in the north-west of England. She left school aged 13, and went into service as a below-stairs maid at the big house. But she realised that there was more to life than being a drudge in such a place, so she sought to 'better herself'. On her days off, she would cycle 15 miles to Carlisle, and use her precious free time learning to type. Her aim was to become one of the new 'lady clerks', who were making a big impact upon office employment.

When she was 17, the First World War broke out, giving her the opportunity she needed. On the opposite shore of the Solway Firth, immediately over the Scottish border, the Government commandeered swathes of land and as a matter of desperate urgency developed Britain's largest facility producing munitions. Stretching from Annan in the west to Longtown in the east, this vast enterprise employed more than 30,000 people, many of them women.

The landlord trusted Lizzie with duplicate keys to every house

My friend's grandmother took the train across the Solway Viaduct into Scotland, and secured a place as a clerk-typist. After the war ended the immense complex was steadily closed down, and she then found work at the local labour exchange, dealing with the vast numbers of unemployed. She also married her boss, the manager of the exchange.

All of this made a fascinating story, but it brought to mind tales I remembered from my own family – about determined, resilient women who were not deterred by a male-dominated system.

I had four great grandmothers. One, Sarah Brown, is an almost invisible figure, about whom I know nothing apart from basic facts of dates and names.

Ellen Hughes was kind, warm and welcoming, much loved by my grandmother (her daughter-in-law). Ellen had a childhood of desperate poverty, and in her married life was not much better off, but she was universally considered a "good woman", who would always help others in need.

Kate Goldring was the daughter of a prosperous London lawyer, and she married another aspiring lawyer, young George Crosby. Four children later, the marriage had collapsed and in 1884 Kate sued for divorce, on the grounds of his physical and mental cruelty. The application failed (because he had not committed adultery), they were reconciled after a fashion – my grandfather was the result – but she was not free until George's death in 1905.

Kate subsequently answered an advertisement in the magazine *The Lady*, placed by a clergyman in western Canada who was seeking a housekeeper. Shortly afterwards, she and my grandfather (in his mid-teens) were off to Calgary and an unimaginably different life. I treasure two letters that she wrote in Canada, in which her personality shines through – sharp, decisive, educated, socially confident, upper-middle-class, rather formidable.

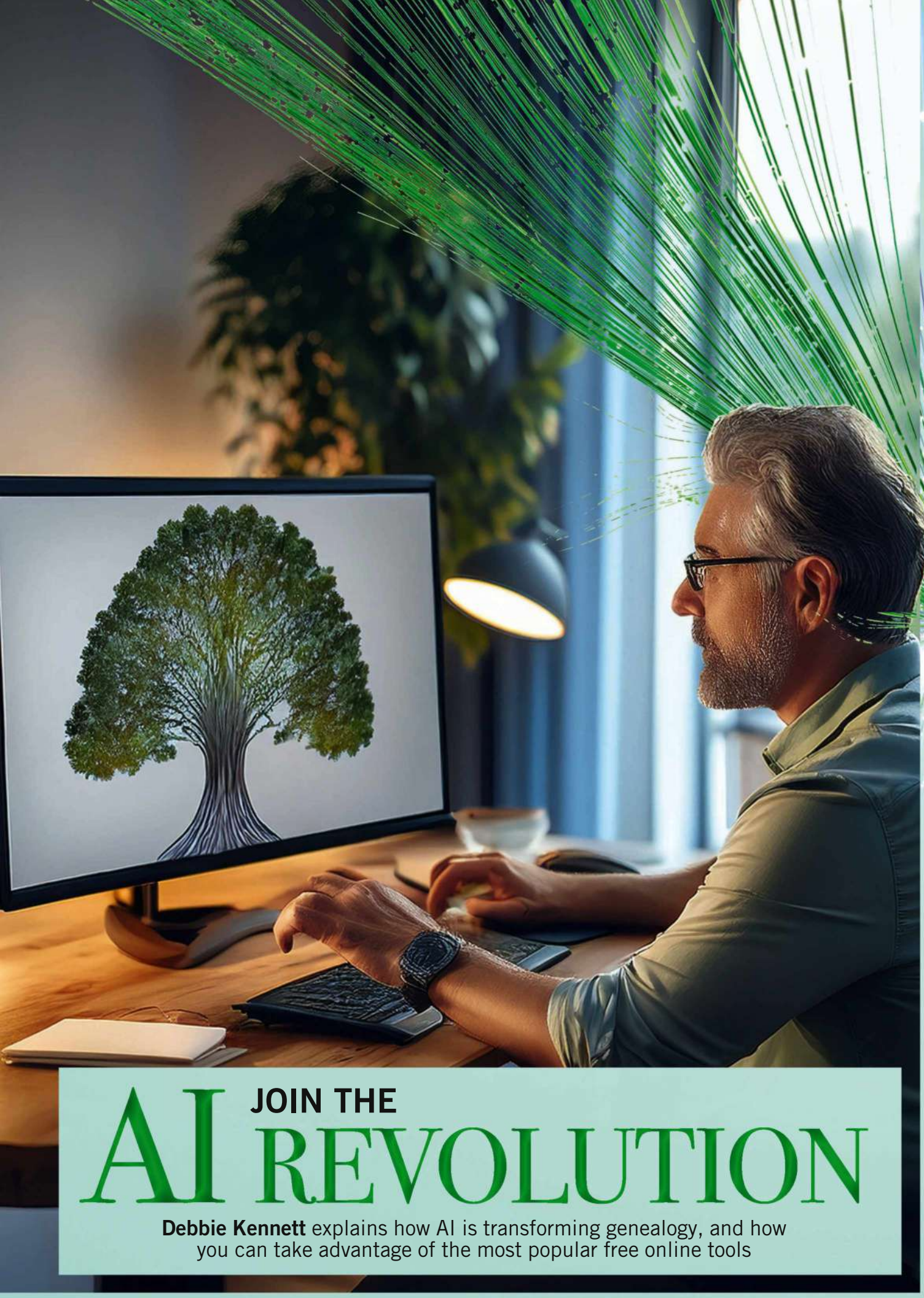
And then there is the last of the quartet, Elizabeth Routledge, born in 1872 in Canal Street, Manchester. This is now the heart of the city's Gay Village, but in the 1870s it was one of the poorest parts of the city. Elizabeth, known as Lizzie, was barely literate, spoke (according to my mother, who adored her) an almost impenetrable Mancunian dialect, and was just 4 feet 10 inches tall. She bore eight children, three of whom died as babies, and she had a fierce temper.

In her widowhood, Lizzie was the key-keeper for the neighbourhood – the landlord trusted her with duplicate keys to every house, and she had the right of entry to any of them (to check that nobody was 'up to no good'). She was also the layer-out: washing, tidying and dressing the corpses of deceased neighbours for viewing before the funeral.

This was a strong woman, tough and resourceful, who made her place in the world in the face of considerable adversity. She died 10 years before I was born, so I never knew her. I might have been terrified of her!

ALAN CROSBY lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*

ILLUSTRATION WWW.SUEGENT.COM



JOIN THE AI REVOLUTION

Debbie Kennett explains how AI is transforming genealogy, and how you can take advantage of the most popular free online tools

IMAGE GENERATED USING ADOBE PHOTOSHOP

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems that mimic human intelligence to perform tasks like learning, reasoning, and problem-solving. In family history and genealogy research, AI is revolutionizing how data is discovered, organised, and interpreted. It can transcribe handwritten historical records, translate foreign-language documents, and recognise patterns in vast datasets to suggest family connections. AI tools can also analyse DNA results to identify genetic matches and ancestral origins. By automating time-consuming tasks and uncovering hidden relationships, AI helps genealogists build more accurate and comprehensive family trees faster than ever before. Its role continues to grow with ongoing advancements.

The opening paragraph of this article was written not by me but by ChatGPT (**chatgpt.com**). I asked the tool to "Describe in 100 words what artificial intelligence is and how it is being used in family history and genealogy research". It's given me a reasonable introduction to the subject, although it has missed out some of the important points that I wanted to discuss.

Nevertheless it provides a useful demonstration of how far these tools have advanced since ChatGPT took the world by storm when it launched in November 2022.

Some AI tools can now transcribe handwritten records

AI has reached the point where it is an integral part of genealogy research

AI tools have in fact been around for a long time. I still remember the sense of wonder when I got my first scanner, and I was able to convert typewritten letters into Word documents using optical character recognition (OCR). Technological advances mean that AI has reached the point where it is an integral part of genealogy research. Even if you are not using an AI tool yourself, it is being deployed by the genealogy companies to transcribe, index and catalogue records.

Ancestry's AI Advantage

For example, it took Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) several months to transcribe the 132 million names in the 1940 US census in 2012. However, thanks to proprietary AI-powered handwriting technology, 10 years later the firm transcribed the 150 million records in the 1950 US census in just nine days. The company also uses AI to generate hints for your family tree, and is now using AI on some record collections, such as historic newspapers, to generate hints automatically.

Many of the DNA features at Ancestry are powered by AI as well, such as the algorithms that deliver lists of DNA matches, ▶

Where There's A Will, There's A Way

This ongoing project demonstrates how AI tools are being used to transcribe historic records

The project 'The Material Culture of Wills: England 1540–1790' is run by the University of Exeter in collaboration with The National Archives at Kew. Launched in November 2023, the four-year project aims to transcribe 25,000 wills from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. The goal is to analyse these wills to understand how people's relationships with their possessions have evolved over time. Many people took the trouble of describing in some detail the possessions they passed on to family and friends, and this selection of objects can be revealing of people's values.

The project's website includes a link if you want to volunteer to check the AI-generated transcriptions

The project uses a combination of automatic transcription, expert volunteers and crowdsourcing to process wills quickly and efficiently. More than 2,500 volunteers are helping out by checking and correcting the AI-generated transcriptions online, ensuring that they meet high standards for accuracy.

For more details, head to the project's website at **sites.exeter.ac.uk/materialcultureofwills** or visit the blog, which includes an interesting "Will of the Month" feature: **sites.exeter.ac.uk/materialcultureofwills/blog**. And if you'd like to volunteer to help with the transcription effort, please see **zooniverse.org/projects/hjsmith/the-material-culture-of-wills-england-1540-1790**.

IMAGE GENERATED USING CHATGPT

the SideView technology that splits matches into two parental sides, and the ThruLines feature that uses family trees and genealogy records to work out how you are related to matches. While these features can produce false hits, they are improving all the time and they have allowed me to make many discoveries that I probably wouldn't have made with my own manual searches.

FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) launched its Full Text Search experiment at its family history conference RootsTech in 2024, to much excitement. This feature provides access to digitised record collections that have been indexed using AI. About 500 million images from 1,300 collections were added in 2024, and in 2025 the goal is to add another one billion images. AI is now even automating the process of adding and categorising the collections. FamilySearch has added summaries of the documents and, where appropriate, translations into English. Its AI is now able to identify names and places, so if you are searching for a surname that is also a common word (eg "Brown" and "brown") you will get much better results. To access the feature, log into your FamilySearch account and go to the Labs page at **familysearch.org/en/labs.**

MyHeritage's tools can enhance and colourise photos

MyHeritage (**myheritage.com**) has also been using AI to transcribe and index documents and has provided some interesting AI-powered tools for its members, including a suite that can be used to edit, repair, enhance, colourise and animate photos. The photo-colourisation tool is one of the best on the market. Another tool will estimate the date that a photo was taken. Some of the other tools are somewhat gimmicky, and are either loved or hated. The AI Time Machine (**myheritage.com/ai-time-machine**) reveals what you might have looked like in different eras, while the Deep Nostalgia tool (**myheritage.com/deep-nostalgia**)

MyHeritage's photo-colourisation tool is one of the best on the market

How To Generate An Image With ChatGPT

Debbie explains how to create a realistic-looking picture to illustrate your research using ChatGPT (chatgpt.com)

1 First I searched for historical information about the image I wanted to create. I used ChatGPT to learn more about the SS *Minnewaska*, on which my great uncle sailed from London to New York in September 1923.

2 The prompt "Use the above information to create a photo-realistic image of the SS Minnewaska in September 1923. I would like a calm ocean and a sunny day with a blue sky" produced the above picture.

3 In the image the ship had three funnels instead of the correct number (one), so I refined it with a follow-up prompt. The new picture may still not be perfect, but you can always revise it with further prompts.

animates faces in family photos, and LiveMemory (**myheritage.com/livememory/**) conjures up a five-second video from a single picture. I found the animated faces rather creepy, but was touched by an animated video of my family's long-deceased dog.

In addition to the AI tools provided by genealogy companies, there is a bewildering range of general-purpose tools that family historians can use in their research – and the market is very competitive, with new features and functionality being added all the time. The tools generally operate on a 'freemium' model: they are free to use, but with daily limits on image generation, file uploads and data analysis. The subscription services have fewer limits and extra functionality. To keep up with developments it helps to join Facebook Groups, watch webinars and listen to podcasts from experts who've done a lot of experimenting (see the 'Resources' box).

As mentioned earlier, one obvious use of AI is for transcribing documents. There are specialist tools such as Transkribus (**transkribus.org**) and Ancestry's Image Transcript tool (see the box), but some of the general tools can also generate transcriptions. Results are mixed, and you may need to spend considerable time checking and editing the transcription, but the tools are improving rapidly. If you have a document in a foreign language you can also use AI to translate it into English. The models are particularly good at summarising documents and presentations. You might also want to use AI to extract information, such as occurrences of specific surnames or references to particular places. You can then ask the tool to format the data into a table. The tools can even write poems and compose songs.

If you've recorded interviews with relatives, you can generate a transcription using a specialised AI tool such as Otter (**otter.ai**). If you're on the committee of a family history society you can use such a tool to transcribe notes from meetings and conferences.

Photo-editing software programs are using AI to automate tasks that previously required a lot of manual work. The programs can automatically fix blemishes, add or remove objects, adjust contrast and lighting, and colourise photos.

Image generation is one of the most fun ways to use AI, and I am increasingly using AI images to illustrate my presentations. I've also been experimenting with generating AI images to illustrate my family history research. Try creating an image ▶

How To Ask AI A Question

Get the best results when prompting an AI tool

1. Define the role you want the tool to assume such as a professional genealogist, a genetic genealogist, an ethicist or an academic historian.
2. Describe what you want the tool to do in simple, straightforward language. You will get better results from verbs such as find, transcribe, calculate, summarise, analyse, translate and format.
3. Give the tool all of the background information you have available, such as the date of the document or image, and the names and places involved.
4. Be careful about sharing any private information with an AI tool. You run the risk that your personal details could be incorporated into the training model that the developer is using.
5. Practice makes perfect. Experiment to find out how to get the best out of the tools. The more you use them, the better the results.

4 AI Tools To Try Out Now

Debbie recommends these tools if you want to generate text or images, or transcribe records… plus four alternative options

CHATGPT
w **chatgpt.com**

ChatGPT currently dominates the market. It's also one of the most useful AI tools for generating images. It operates on a freemium model with daily limits on the number of free messages and images, but subscription options for power users.

Also Try
GEMINI
w **gemini.google.com**

Google's AI tool works well with Google Mail, Google Docs etc.

COPILOT
w **copilot.microsoft.com**

Copilot will draft content, summarise documents, and generate images. If you have an active subscription to Office 365, the tool is also integrated into Word, PowerPoint and other Microsoft apps, and available through your web browser.

Also Try
PERPLEXITY
w **perplexity.ai**

Perplexity is good for research, providing up-to-date citations.

GROK
w **x.ai/grok**

Grok is embedded into X (formerly Twitter), but is also available as a standalone app. It can be used to ask questions, and to generate and edit images. Its integration with X's newsfeed make it useful for extracting information about current events.

Also Try
CLAUDE
w **claude.ai**

This tool for writing and analysis focuses on safety and privacy.

IMAGE TRANSCRIPT
w **ancestry.co.uk**

This transcription tool from Ancestry is in beta testing. You can upload a photo of a record to 'Gallery', go to 'Memories', open the image and click the 'Transcribe' button. The results are mixed, but the tool is improving.

Also Try
TRANSKRIBUS
w **transkribus.org**

This is a specialised site for transcribing handwritten historical documents.

AI is set to play a big part in genealogy, and can be used to create images such as this one created with ChatGPT

▶ to represent particular episodes in your ancestors' lives, such as a ship a relative sailed on (see the box). You have to do a lot of experimenting to get the best results, and the tools can't always do what you want because of the limitations of the training data, but results can be very convincing.

Challenges

While AI is transforming genealogy research, it is also creating challenges. Best practice dictates that the use of AI tools should always be declared, but inevitably this does not always happen. Deepfake videos and photos are widely circulated, and the quality is now so good that it can be difficult to distinguish between reality and the fakes. Watermarks can be added to photos, but it is equally possible to use tools to remove them.

What's more, the AI tools can introduce factual errors known as 'hallucinations' and there is a danger that these can become embedded in the historical record, creating significant challenges for the family historians of the future.

Also, AI tools rely on vast datasets of publicly available material for their training data, much of which is under copyright. Many content creators, such as writers, artists, photographers and publishers, argue that they should be paid for the use of their material and have launched lawsuits, whereas the AI tools' developers argue that it's 'fair use' without any infringement of copyright, or that their models are using patterns in the data rather than making exact copies. Courts and governments worldwide are deciding how to respond.

There is also a lack of transparency about the exact source material used to generate a particular piece of text or an image, and at least in the USA you do not own the copyright of an image you've generated with AI unless you then edit it manually.

In addition, training and using generative AI tools is very energy-intensive. It's been estimated that answering a ChatGPT prompt uses almost 10 times as much electricity as a Google search.

The legal and ethical issues will continue to evolve, but AI is here to stay and will play an increasingly integral part in our daily lives – and our research.

DEBBIE KENNETT is a genealogist and the author of *DNA and Social Networking* (The History Press, 2011)

Resources

Take your research further

FACEBOOK GROUPS

AI HELP FOR GENEALOGY (UK)
w **facebook.com/groups/aiforgenealogyuk**
This Facebook Group focuses on developments in the UK.

GENEALOGY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)
w **facebook.com/groups/genealogyandai**
Join the 10,800 members of this very busy Facebook Group.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS & TACTICS
w **facebook.com/groups/aitoolsandtactics**
Genealogists use this Group to discuss more general uses of AI.

PODCAST

THE FAMILY HISTORY AI SHOW
w **blubrry.com/3738800/**
Genealogists Steve Little from the USA and Mark Thompson from Canada present this podcast.

WEBSITES

AI GENEALOGY INSIGHTS
w **aigenealogyinsights.com**
Steve Little's site includes a blog and links to tools and resources.

COALITION FOR RESPONSIBLE AI IN GENEALOGY
w **craigen.org/**
This US group has defined basic principles for the responsible and ethical use of AI in genealogy.

GENEA-MUSINGS
w **www.geneamusings.com/p/artificial-intelligence-posts.html**
US genealogist Randy Seaver's blog includes this collection of links to blog posts, online articles and tools. He also provides a list of videos and webinars, as well as custom AI prompts.

IMAGE GENERATED USING CHATGPT

WHAT'S IN A NAME

It makes perfect sense that family historians tend to focus on surnames. But forenames can also reveal essential information about your family, says **Sarah Williams**

Forenames are a funny business. As a parent, I remember countless days worrying about what my children were going to be called. Should we honour family members or family traditions? Should we be influenced by current trends, or try to come up with a name that would somehow give our children a competitive edge in the world? And when my first child was born, it felt so odd giving her a name that we just called her 'baby' for the first couple of days.

Celebrities often choose distinctive names for their children. David and Victoria Beckham named their kids *(left to right)* Romeo, Cruz, Harper and Brooklyn

GETTY IMAGES

If the number of websites and books dedicated to the subject are anything to go by, parents still struggle with the challenge of naming their children and the diversity of choices has massively increased. The National Records of Scotland (**nrscotland.gov.uk**) publishes statistics every year on the names chosen at birth registrations, and has noted that the number of different names increases every year along with the number of unique names.

From Fifi To X AE A-Xii

I'm old enough to remember the public dismay over singer–songwriter Bob Geldof's selection of names for his daughters in the 1980s. Now, however, I suspect his choices of Fifi Trixibelle and Peaches Honeyblossom wouldn't raise an eyebrow in a nursery, although perhaps the name X AE A-Xii chosen by tech billionaire ▶

▶ Elon Musk for one of his sons still pushes the boundaries of forenames, to say the least.

Mind you, Victorians weren't above raising a few eyebrows with their name choices. Four children are recorded as being given the biblical name Mahershalalhashbaz in 19th-century civil records, with the name also appearing occasionally as a middle name. Not only was it a mouthful, but it invariably resulted in a certain amount of ridicule in the newspapers.

This desire for uniqueness is a move away from more traditional naming patterns where first or second (or even third or fourth) names were chosen to mark family connections. In Scotland, traditional naming patterns were a lot more common, making forenames a useful tool for family historians. Traditionally, the first son was named after the father's father, the second son was named after the mother's father, and the third son was named after the father. For daughters, the first was named after the mother's mother, the second after the father's mother, and the third named after the mother.

Middle names can also be a clue to family connections, especially those that sound like a surname. Sometimes a wife's maiden name becomes a child's middle name. In my family, my great grandfather decided to honour his mother's maiden name by giving all of his children the middle name Somerville and the tradition continued for generations, making it easy for me to find family and confirm connections.

The boy's name Albert surged in popularity after Queen Victoria and Prince Albert married in 1840

Forenames can also supply clues about the parents' interests or backgrounds. Finding an unusual name such as Cinderella, Esmeralda or Goliath could be a sign that you have Romany Travellers in your ancestry (see **whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com/tutorials/am-i-descended-from-gypsies** for more suggestions). And early nonconformists liked to name their children (particularly daughters) after virtues such as Grace, Charity, Mercy, Patience and Temperance, although some of these names gained later popularity outside the nonconformist community.

Sometimes a wife's maiden name becomes a child's middle name

Just as now, parents were often influenced by celebrities and royalty. Albert became a very popular choice after Queen Victoria's marriage in 1840, and Florence soared up the naming charts after Florence Nightingale's work as a nurse during the Crimean War (1853–1856) turned her into a celebrity. Interestingly, she was named after the Italian city where she was born and it's certainly worth investigating the reason if a place name is used as your relation's forename.

Fictional Inspiration

The names of fictional characters in popular books also often influenced the parents' choice. For example, US author Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was hugely popular in Britain, arguably more so than in her own country, and the angelic Eva inspired a wave of popularity for a name that almost didn't exist before the book's publication.

Although boys' names tended to stick to traditional options in the Victorian era, the end of the 19th century saw a literal flowering of options for girls as names such as Rose, Daisy, Iris and Violet became popular.

Events also sometimes influenced name choices, especially military battles. The Crimean War inspired a flurry of boys named Inkerman in 1855 and the girls' name Alma soared in popularity in 1854 as well, remaining popular for decades. Although baby-naming websites refer to Latin and Hebrew meanings for the name Alma, it was a bloody battle on the Crimean peninsula

Name Abbreviations

Common forenames were often abbreviated in genealogical records

BOYS	Charles ↓ *Chas*	Christopher ↓ *Xpr*	George ↓ *Geo*	Henry ↓ *Hy*	James ↓ *Jas*	John ↓ *Jno*	Jonathan ↓ *Jon*	Robert ↓ *Robt*	Thomas ↓ *Thos*	William ↓ *Wm*
GIRLS	Anne ↓ *An*	Catherine ↓ *Cath*	Dorothy ↓ *Dy*	Eleanor ↓ *Elnr*	Elizabeth ↓ *Eliz*	Helen ↓ *Hel*	Isabel ↓ *Isb*	Margaret ↓ *Margt*	Mary ↓ *My*	Sarah ↓ *Sar*

GETTY IMAGES

In the late 1800s girls were often named after flowers such as Iris, Daisy, Violet and Rose

in 1854 that first introduced the name to the British Isles.

Similarly, the Second Boer War (1899–1902) has left a legacy in names chosen around the turn of the 20th century. Ladysmith and Mafeking appear as first and middle names. The Battle of Majuba Hill (1881) encouraged at least two families with the surname Hill to name a child Majuba. In fact, there is probably a circle of hell dedicated to parents who choose a forename that combines comically with their surname – FreeBMD (**freebmd.org.uk**) reveals numerous children named Rose Bush and Arch Bishop, for example.

The Second Boer War (1899-1902) inspired names such as Mafeking, Ladysmith and Alma

GETTY IMAGES

When it comes to battle names, the First World War had the biggest impact, from Arras and Ypres to Verdun and Vimy (both as first and middle names). It is tempting to assume that battle names were given in remembrance of someone who died on the field, but that is not always the case.

During her 2020 episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, actor Jodie Whittaker was told by her father that her grandmother was given Verdun as a middle name in honour of her brother Walter who died during the battle. Unfortunately, the family story was disproved, and it seems more likely that the name was given simply because it was popular at that time.

TOP TIP!

It's important to remember that forenames exclusively given to male babies today, such as James, were also used for baby girls up until the 17th century.

The Context Is Crucial

Knowing the history and customs behind forenames can be a useful tool for family historians.

For example, in the past it was not unusual for a person to use a middle name as their main name, with their official first name only appearing in their birth or baptism record.

Others used their names flexibly, switching from their official first name for more formal records, such as marriage registers, to their commonly used name in, say, census records.

It also helps to understand the use of diminutives or shortened names when looking for people in the records. It may be obvious that a Charles was known as Charlie, but if you are looking for a Mary or Margaret, it helps to know that her family may have called her Molly, a Helen may have used Nellie, or a Sarah may have been known as Sally.

Whatever names our parents chose for us (or we choose for ourselves), they are more than just an identifying moniker. They reflect the time we live in, our culture and, most importantly, our family.

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WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

'My Relatives Include Royalty, Soldiers And Clan Chieftains'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

From Victorian Glasgow to the English Civil War, and ancient clan chieftains to the royal family, Jim Robson's tree stretches the length of the British Isles says **Claire Vaughan**

A chance remark on an outing with his parents kickstarted Jim Robson's family history journey. Little did the IT consultant, who lives in Paisley, Renfrewshire, know what an epic route it would take, including tales of Temperance pioneers, military men, Scottish peers and royalty.

"When I was 12, my parents took me to Kelvingrove Art Gallery in Glasgow to see an exhibition devoted to designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Half joking, my mum said, 'Some of this furniture should belong to me', because she had been told that she was related to the items' owner, Miss Kate Cranston, proprietor of the Cranston tearooms."

Catherine Cranston (1849–1934) was a leading figure in the creation of Glasgow's tearooms during the late 19th century, against the backdrop of the city's Temperance Movement and the Glasgow School artistic movement. "Mum was keen to follow the link up, but lacked the time, knowledge or finances.

"She sadly died in 1994, but I picked up the family history baton 20 years later."

Mum died in 1994, but I picked up the family history baton 20 years later

Jim hunted through records of births, marriages and deaths, as well as census entries. He was rewarded with the discovery that Kate Cranston was his second cousin three times removed. "It feels quite strange whenever I pay for something with a £20 note, because Kate's face is on it."

Bitten by the bug, he kept going, uncovering more notable Cranstons as he went. They included Robert (1815–1892), brother of George (1831–1892), Jim's great great grandfather. Robert was a pioneer of the Temperance Movement, and his portrait hangs in Edinburgh City Chambers. His son was a prominent military man. "Among other things, Brigadier-General Sir Robert Cranston (1843–1923) co-founded the Queen Victoria School for Orphans of Soldiers and Sailors who served in the armed forces, and was a lord provost of Edinburgh, a position similar to that of a lord mayor."

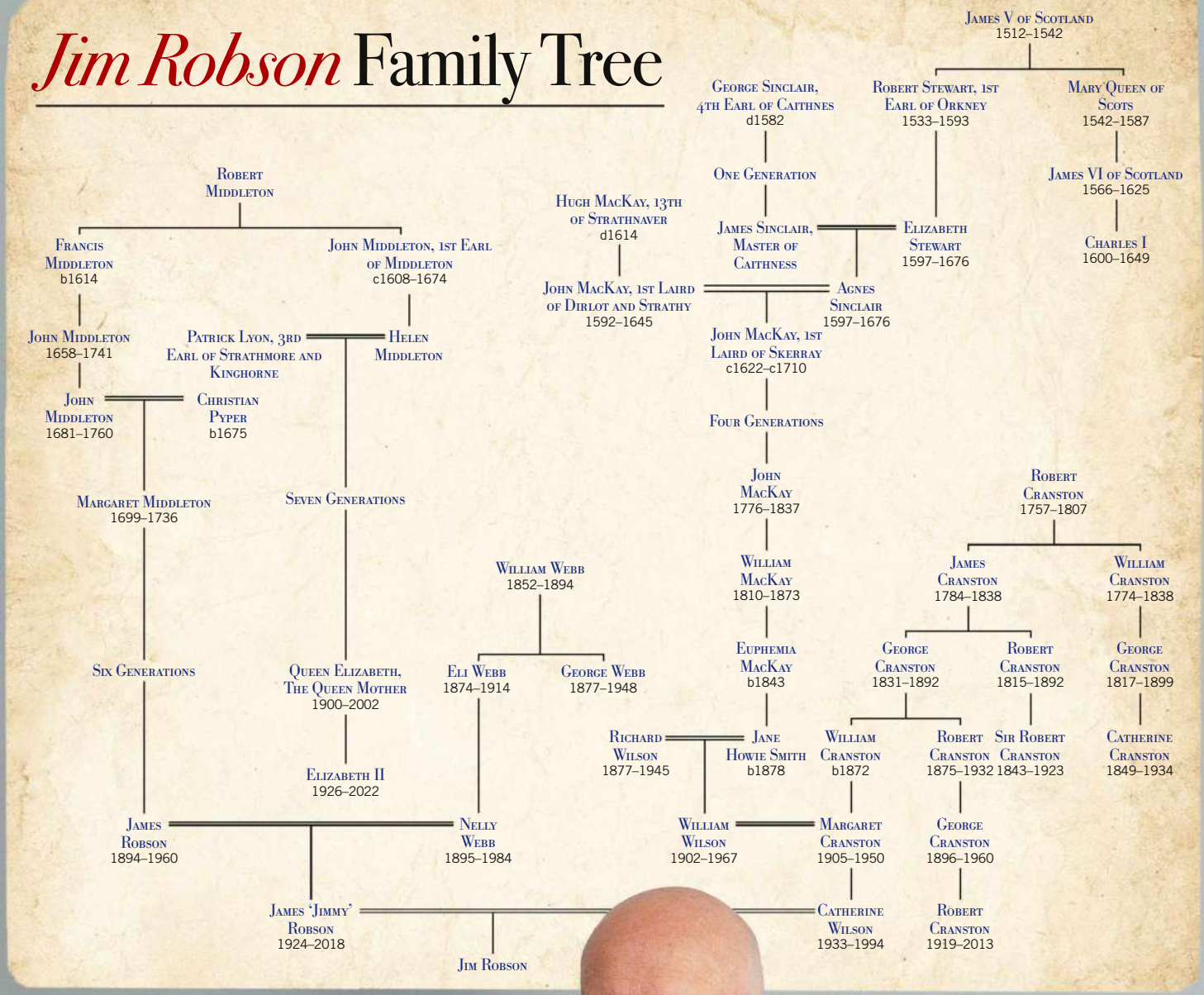
Jim uncovered his family's connection to the entrepreneur Kate Cranston

UNP/PETER SANDGROUND

From Scotland To Texas

Jim began investigating more distant Cranston relations. "My great grandfather, William Cranston (born 1872), had a nephew, George Cranston (1896–1960), who emigrated to Canada and later Texas in the USA where he ran a radio station." When the Second World War broke out, George's son Robert (1919–2013) joined the US Army's Signal Corps. With his knowledge of broadcasting gained while ▶

Jim Robson Family Tree



helping his father, Robert later headed up the rapidly expanding American Forces Network (AFN) broadcasting programmes to US military personnel, went on to become chief of news and special events in the radio and TV branch of the Information Office in Washington, and then ran the worldwide Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS). His contribution earned Colonel Bob Cranston (as he was later known) the Distinguished Service Medal to go with a Purple Heart for being wounded at the Battle of the Bulge (1944–1945), and he is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. "You can see Bob presenting a 1940s AFN newsreel on YouTube (**tinyurl.com/yt-afn-cranston**)."

There are more military men elsewhere on Jim's tree. On his dad's side, his great grandfather Eli Webb (1874–1914) died in the First World War. "He signed up with the Highland Light Infantry in September 1914, was sent out the first week of December 1914 and was killed in the second week of December." His brother, George Webb (1877–1948), also served, but neither of them were raw recruits.

Before the war, Eli had been in the Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers, a Scottish Volunteer unit within the British Army, and later joined the Cameronians (7th Scottish Rifles). George served with the 1st Battalion Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in Sudan, Africa, between 1886 and 1899. He also fought in the Second Boer War (1899–1902) with the 2nd Battalion Seaforth Highlanders, finishing his career as a captain with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (possibly because his mother had been born in Ireland).

TELL YOUR STORY

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

English Ancestry

Eli and George's father was also in the Army. "George was born in Dover in March 1877. His birth certificate records his father, William, as a corporal in the 6th Regiment of Foot." According to a local newspaper, in October 1877 a William Webb of the 6th Foot deserted. "He seemed to disappear until the 1890s, when the family popped up in Bridgeton, Glasgow. We had no idea where he came from until I found his birth details in a newspaper. He was born in Holcombe, Somerset." Jim was shocked to learn that Eli's family was actually English. "I managed to trace the Webbs back to the 15th century in Somerset."

For Jim though, the most profound military story in his family is that of his father, Jimmy. Born in 1924, Jimmy contracted diphtheria as a boy and was left with no hearing in one ear. "When the Second World War kicked off and he tried to enlist in the Army when he turned 18, they rejected him because he was partially deaf." Jimmy tried the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, but again was deemed to be unfit.

"He was desperate, he really wanted to join up. The only force that would take him was the Home Guard." So he signed up to 'Dad's Army'.

When the Home Guard disbanded at the end of 1945, members received a certificate from George VI thanking them for their hard work and readiness to fight. But not everyone saw it that way. "One day when Jimmy was out in Glasgow during the war, a woman approached him and handed him a white feather.

"My father was no coward. He really wanted to join his friends, and serve his king and country overseas. I think it was his one disappointment," says Jim.

While researching his Middleton and MacKay branches, Jim found more military links – along with some huge surprises.

"Using Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), I managed to get back as far as my 7x great grandmother, Margaret Middleton (1699–1736). I later found her in the Old Parish Registers on ScotlandsPeople (**scotlandspeople.gov.uk**). Her parents were John Middleton and Christian Pyper."

John's grandfather was a man called Francis Middleton whose name came up in a sasine, a land-transfer document. This revealed that Francis, Jim's 10x great grandfather, was the brother of John Middleton, the 1st Earl of Middleton (c1608–1674), a professional soldier who fought in the English Civil War. "He supported the Parliamentarians – until he discovered that his father,

Sir Robert Cranston held the position of lord provost of Edinburgh from 1903 until 1906

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Jim's father Jimmy photographed as a young man and towards the end of his life

Robert Middleton, had been run through by a Parliamentarian soldier and his home burned down. So John switched sides to the Royalist cause."

Royal Link

Charles II later made him General Sir John Middleton, the 1st Earl of Middleton. Helen Middleton, his daughter, married Patrick Lyon, 3rd Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne. One of their descendants was Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. "That would have made her daughter, Elizabeth II, my 10th cousin," laughs Jim.

On his mum's side, his great great grandmother Euphemia MacKay (born 1843) also had a fascinating heritage. Jim found that her grandfather was a soldier called John Mackay (1776–1837) who fought in the Napoleonic War (1803–1815) and Peninsular War (1807–1814). His military records on Ancestry showed that he was injured during the Peninsular campaign, and honourably discharged. Jim found his details in the Chelsea Pensioner records, which revealed that his mother was named Janet MacKay, who turned out to be a gateway ancestor.

Janet featured in *The Book of MacKay* (Norman MacLeod, 1906), written by Angus MacKay and containing "genealogical accounts of the principal families of MacKay". Using excerpts online, Jim traced his lineage back from Janet, also known by the Gaelic name NinDholicEorishSkerray, which held her origins.

"It seems that Janet was the great great granddaughter of John MacKay, 1st Laird of Skerray (c1622–c1710), and 3x great granddaughter of John MacKay, 1st Laird of Dirlot and Strathy. He was married to Agnes Sinclair (1597–1676) whose father was James Sinclair, Master of Caithness, and the grandson of the 4th Earl of Caithness."

Agnes' mother was Elizabeth Stewart whose father was Robert Stewart, the 1st Earl of Orkney (1533–1593). Robert was the acknowledged illegitimate son of James V of Scotland, and half-brother of Mary Queen of Scots, mother of James VI of Scotland (James I of England). Charles I was James V's great grandson, so Jim is the 13x great grandson of James V and Charles I is his 2nd cousin 12 times removed.

"I wanted to be 100 per cent sure, so contacted the Strathnaver Museum in Thurso, Caithness, home of the Clan MacKay research (**www.strathnavermuseum.org.uk**). The genealogist said, 'Yes, there's absolutely no doubt.' "

He verified the line all the way back, and also found that John MacKay was the brother of Donald MacKay, 1st Lord Reay, 14th of Strathnaver, a chief of the Clan MacKay.

So not only is Jim descended from English and Scottish royalty, his lineage also includes the chiefs of the Clan MacKay. It's something he never would have believed when he first set out. "I just thought I would find farmers and labourers and journeymen."

Jim adds that no matter your heritage, "You can draw strength from what your ancestors went through. Family is important."

You can draw strength from what your ancestors went through

Resources

These resources helped Jim uncover his family history

Genealogical Chronicles

These are researched lineages that document the heritage of an individual or group of people, such as a clan, to prove their rights of succession. Angus MacKay's *The Book of MacKay* (Norman MacLeod, 1906) is one such example, and on the Internet Archive (**tinyurl.com/arch-book-mackay**). You can find other chronicles online, or in local or national archives.

General Register of Sasines

w **www.ros.gov.uk/our-registers/general-register-of-sasines**

In Scottish law, a sasine is a document that transfers ownership of land or property to another party. You can search sasines back to 1617 for a fee (£30 + VAT per property). Properties registered from the 1870s include a description, location details, and lists of deeds and previous owners.

Old Parish Registers

w **scotlandspeople.gov.uk**

Before the introduction of civil registration in Scotland in 1855, Old Parish Registers (OPRs) including births/baptisms, banns/marriages and deaths/burials were kept by parishes belonging to the Church of Scotland. It was a requirement that they were kept from 1552, but many parishes didn't comply so records may be sparse. The original registers are held by the National Records of Scotland, but digital versions can be searched online for a fee.

18th-Century Parish Registers

Paul Blake explains the complex history of parish registration in England and Wales, and how to find records from the 1700s

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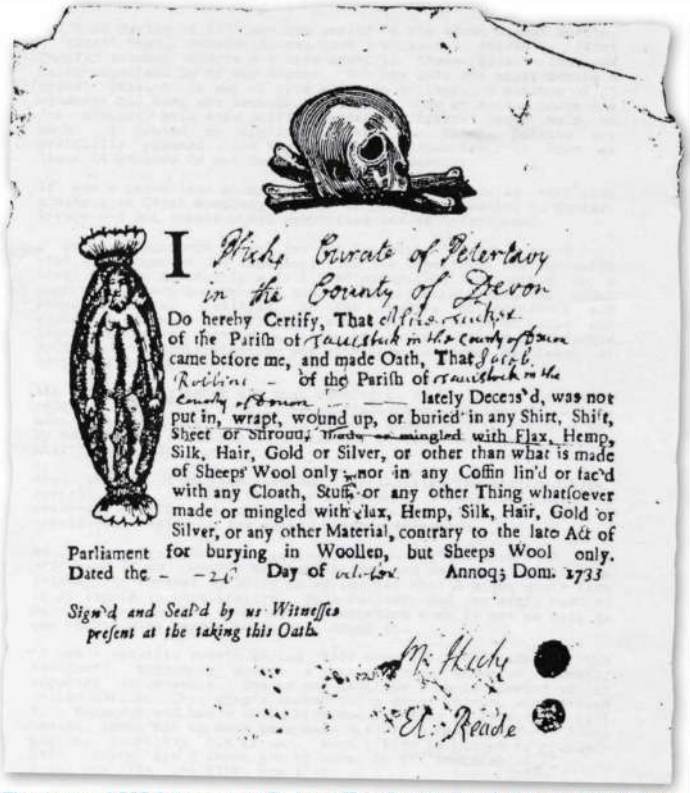
Before the introduction of civil registration of births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales in 1837, it is the parochial registers recording the baptisms, marriages and burials of our ancestors that are the mainstay for discovering the details of our family's heritage. Although many parishes were regularly recording the baptisms, burials and marriages that were performed in the local church, it was not until 1538 that there was any national directive that this should be done on a regular basis, with the records so created being preserved in a parish chest.

However, there was no guidance as to exactly what particulars should be recorded for each event. As a consequence many such details, in countless parishes, are scant to say the least. Such was the situation for the next 150 years, as far as marriages were concerned, and over 200 years for baptisms and burials.

From 1598, copies of the registers that were created by the parishes were to be returned annually to the bishop, and in some cases the archdeacon as well. Unfortunately, the survival and completeness of these 'Bishops' Transcripts' varies enormously depending on the particular parish.

In 1653, during the Commonwealth period under Oliver Cromwell as lord protector, the keeping of registers by the parish was ended and local officials recorded births, marriage and deaths. Although for a few parishes this was well done, for the majority this was not the case, and it is for good reason that the period is often referred to as the 'Commonwealth Gap'.

With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the keeping of parish registers again became the responsibility of the Church improving both the keeping and survival of records. It was also the start of a significant increase in nonconformity, with local groups creating their own records, separate from those of the parish.


I Hicks Curate of Peterdavy in the County of Devon
Do hereby Certify, That of the Parish of Tavistock in the County of Devon came before me, and made Oath, That Joseph Robbins of the Parish of Tavistock in the County of Devon lately Deceas'd, was not put in, wrapt, wound up, or buried in any Shirt, Shift, Sheet or Shroud, nor in any Coffin lin'd or fac'd with any Cloath, Stuff, or any other Thing whatsoever made or mingled with Flax, Hemp, Silk, Hair, Gold or Silver, or other than what is made of Sheeps Wool only; nor in any Coffin lin'd or fac'd with any Cloath, Stuff, or any other Thing whatsoever made or mingled with Flax, Hemp, Silk, Hair, Gold or Silver, or any other Material, contrary to the late Act of Parliament for burying in Woollen, but Sheeps Wool only.
Dated the 24 Day of Annoq; Dom. 1733
Sign'd and Seal'd by us Witnesses present at the taking this Oath.
M. Hicks
E. Reade

Thanks to a 1666 Act, you may find an affidavit recording that your ancestor was buried in "Sheeps' Wool only". This one from Tavistock, Devon, dates from 1733

Irregular Marriage

There was also an increase in what were described as 'clandestine' or 'irregular' marriages that were not performed in the parish church. Few if any questions were asked of the couple by the 'clergyman', something that particularly attracted couples who hadn't received parental permission, and without banns having been read or a licence issued.

Although London was the main centre for these marriages – the best-known being in the Precincts of the Fleet Prison – it was regarded as a problem in many parts of the country.

Clandestine marriage was regarded as a problem in many parts of the country

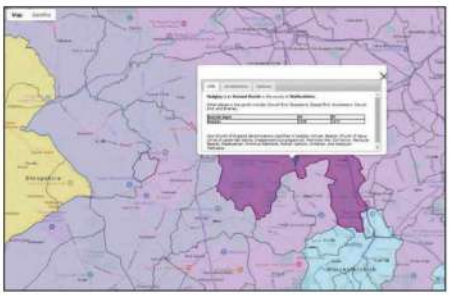
Expert Picks

Paul recommends these three websites to help you track down your forebears' parish registers

DustyDocs

w **dustydocs.com**

Search for a town or parish and find links to registers on free websites like FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**) and county archives' sites.



England Jurisdictions 1851

w **familysearch.org/mapp/**

FamilySearch includes parish maps of the 40 English counties with the dates that the extant parish registers or Bishops' Transcripts begin.

FamilySearch Wiki

w **familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page**

FamilySearch also has details of databases for specific parishes via this guide to birth, death, marriage and other genealogical resources.

Such irregular marriages were behind the first major new legislation to affect the keeping of parish registers since 1538, which was intended to bring an end to the practice.

The 1753 Act for the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriage came into effect on 25 March 1754, following a stormy passage through Parliament. Commonly known as the Clandestine Marriages Act or Hardwicke's Marriage Act – since it was promoted by Philip Yorke, the lord high chancellor and 1st Earl of Hardwicke – it stipulated that marriages could only take place following the publication of banns, which were to be recorded in a special book or within the marriage register, or the issuing of a marriage licence.

The Act also stated that marriages could only be performed by Church of England clergy within a Church of England church – Jews and Quakers were exempted – and that specified particulars of the ceremony and all parties involved should be kept in special registers.

After 1653 the blacksmith's in Gretna Green in Scotland, just across the border from England, was a key marriage venue for couples fleeing parental disapproval

DID YOU KNOW?

Until 1752, register entries usually followed the Julian calendar, the year starting on 25 March. So "20 February 1720" means 1721 in our current, Gregorian calendar.

Banns And Bonds

Banns books can be a useful source, especially as the marrying couple may have come from different parishes and the banns would have been read in both, helping to identify in which parish the marriage took place. Records of licences, issued by the bishops or archbishops, can go back several centuries and may again help identify where a marriage might have taken place as well as providing personal information about the parties. Although few actual licences have survived, the associated 'allegations' and 'bonds' are frequently found.

The 1653 Marriage Act had specified that the age of consent for a man was 16 and 14 for a woman. In 1660 this reverted to the previous ruling of 14 and 12 respectively, and it was not until 1929 that this was raised to 16 for both parties in England and Wales.

The 1753 Act made it illegal for those under the age of 21 to get married without the consent of their parents or guardians. For many couples who were unable or unwilling to comply with the Act, eloping to Scotland became an option.

An Act for Burying in Woollen Onely was passed in 1666, legislating that everyone should be buried in a shroud made from English wool, apart from the destitute and plague victims. The occasional affidavit may survive in the parish collections, and burial entries may be annotated to confirm that the deceased was buried in a woollen shroud. The legislation was in force until 1814, but was generally ignored after 1770.

The first tax on baptisms, marriages and burials was in 1694, but lasted just five years. In 1783 a stamp duty was imposed, of 3d per baptism, burial and marriage. The destitute were exempted and registers may be annotated, usually with a "P" (pauper), to show that this had been the case.

Note that it is probable that many were not actually destitute but the incumbent,

George Rose 1744–1818

The fascinating life of the politician who revolutionised parish registration

George Rose is best known, by family historians at least, as the politician who introduced the Bill for the standardisation of parish registers, which came into force from 1813.

Rose was born at Woodside near Brechin in Angus, Scotland, on 17 June 1744, the second son of Rev. David Rose and his wife Margaret. At the age of four, he was sent to live with an uncle in Hampstead, North-West London. His early education was at Westminster School before he entered the Royal Navy as a midshipman c1758. After suffering a wound during an engagement in the West Indies, he left the Navy in 1762. From 1772 he was employed in several posts in the Civil Service.

He was first elected to Parliament in 1784 representing Launceston in Cornwall. As a close friend and supporter of the prime minister William Pitt he was appointed to a lucrative post in the Exchequer. In 1788 he became clerk to the Parliaments. In the same year he was re-elected to represent Lymington, Hampshire, and in 1790 to represent Christchurch in Dorset, a seat that he held until his death, and continued in important government positions.

Rose was also a close friend of Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson, being one of the last men to see him before his sailing for the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) in which he died. Rose became the executor of Nelson's mistress Emma Hamilton, and guardian of the couple's daughter Horatia. Two years later he was involved in the creation of the National Vaccine Establishment with the inventor of the smallpox vaccine Edward Jenner.

Rose married Theodora Duer in 1769, and they had two sons and a daughter. He died on 13 January 1818 at Lyndhurst, Hampshire, and was interred at Christchurch Priory.

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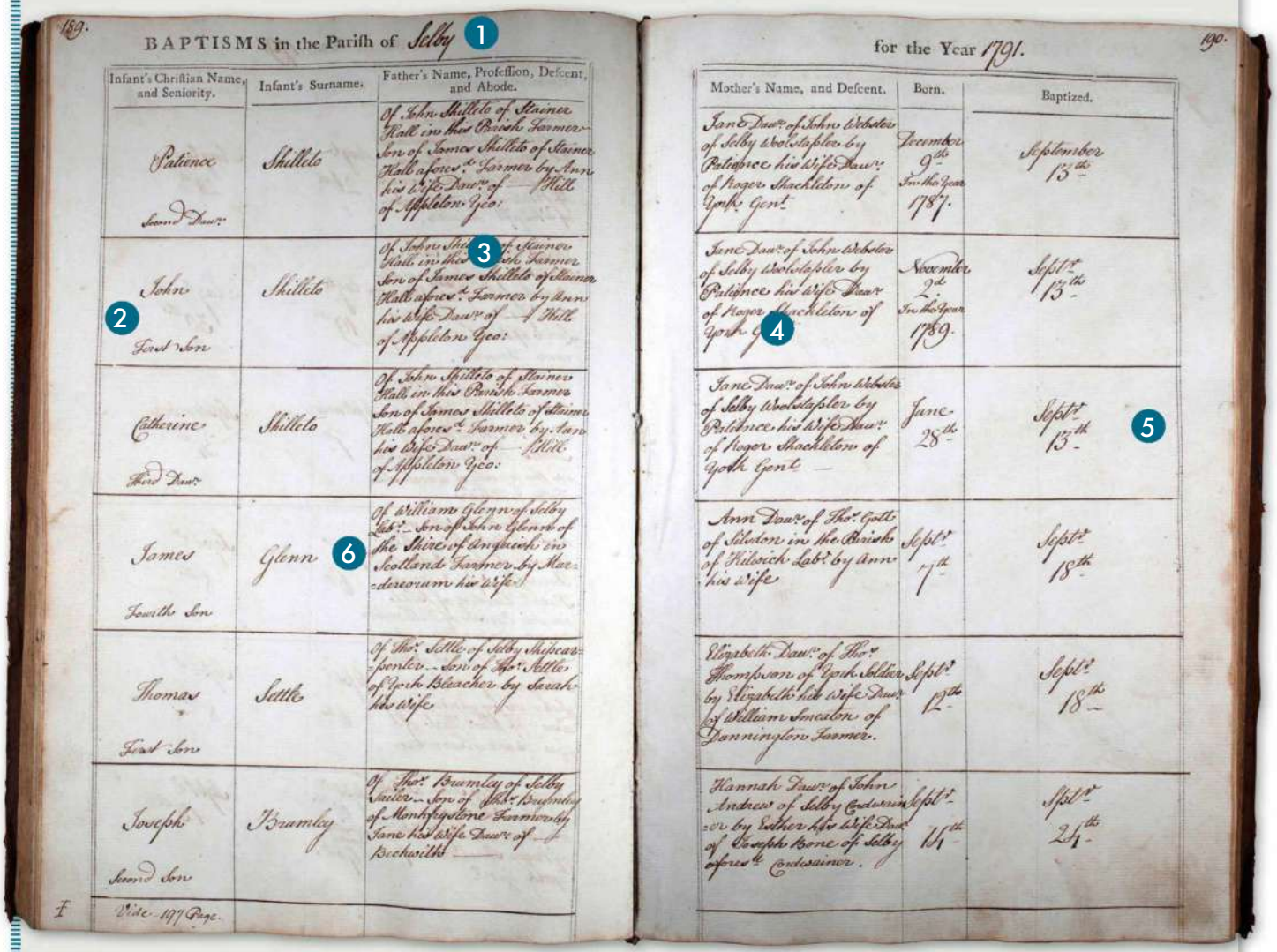
Dade Register, 1791

This register is held by the Borthwick Institute for Archives at the University of York and is on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**)



189.

BAPTISMS in the Parish of Selby 1 for the Year 1791. 190.

Infant's Christian Name, and Seniority.	Infant's Surname.	Father's Name, Profession, Descent, and Abode.	Mother's Name, and Descent.	Born.	Baptized.
Patience, Second Dau.r	Shilleto	Of John Shilleto of Stainer Hall in this Parish Farmer Son of James Shilleto of Stainer Hall afores.d Farmer by Ann his Wife Dau.r of — Hill of Appleton Yeo:	Jane Dau.r of John Webster of Selby Woolstapler by Patience his Wife Dau.r of Roger Shackleton of York Gent.	December 9th In the Year 1787.	September 13th
2 John, First Son	Shilleto	3 Of John Shilleto of Stainer Hall in this Parish Farmer Son of James Shilleto of Stainer Hall afores.d Farmer by Ann his Wife Dau.r of — Hill of Appleton Yeo:	Jane Dau.r of John Webster of Selby Woolstapler by Patience his Wife Dau.r of Roger Shackleton of York 4	November 2d In the Year 1789.	Sept.r 13th
Catherine, Third Dau.r	Shilleto	Of John Shilleto of Stainer Hall in this Parish Farmer Son of James Shilleto of Stainer Hall afores.d Farmer by Ann his Wife Dau.r of — Hill of Appleton Yeo:	Jane Dau.r of John Webster of Selby Woolstapler by Patience his Wife Dau.r of Roger Shackleton of York Gent.	June 28th	Sept.r 13th 5
James, Fourth Son	Glenn 6	Of William Glenn of Selby Lab.r Son of John Glenn of the Shire of Anguish in Scotland Farmer by Mardereorum his Wife	Ann Dau.r of Tho.s Gott of Silsdon in the Parish of Kilsich Lab.r by Ann his Wife	Sept.r 7th	Sept.r 18th
Thomas, First Son	Settle	Of Tho.s Settle of Selby Shepearpenter Son of Tho.s Settle of York Bleacher by Sarah his Wife	Elizabeth Dau.r of Tho.s Thompson of York Soldier by Elizabeth his Wife Dau.r of William Smealon of Dannington Farmer.	Sept.r 12th	Sept.r 18th
Joseph, Second Son	Bramley	Of Tho.s Bramley of Selby Sailor Son of Tho.s Bramley of Monkpystone Farmer by Jane his Wife Dau.r of — Beckwith	Hannah Dau.r of John Andrew of Selby Cordwainer by Esther his Wife Dau.r of Joseph Bone of Selby afores.d Cordwainer.	Sept.r 15th	Sept.r 25th

f Vide 197 Page.

1 Selby
Selby was one of the many parishes in Yorkshire's West Riding that followed William Dade's system for recording baptism and burials in greater depth.

2 Seniority
In addition to the child's forename and surname, their "seniority" is noted. Here, three Shilleto siblings have been baptised at the same time, including "first son" John.

3 Father's Details
The third column details the father's name (also John Shilleto), profession ("farmer") and abode, together with the name, profession and abode of *his* father (James Shilleto, who was a farmer too) and mother – the child's paternal grandparents.

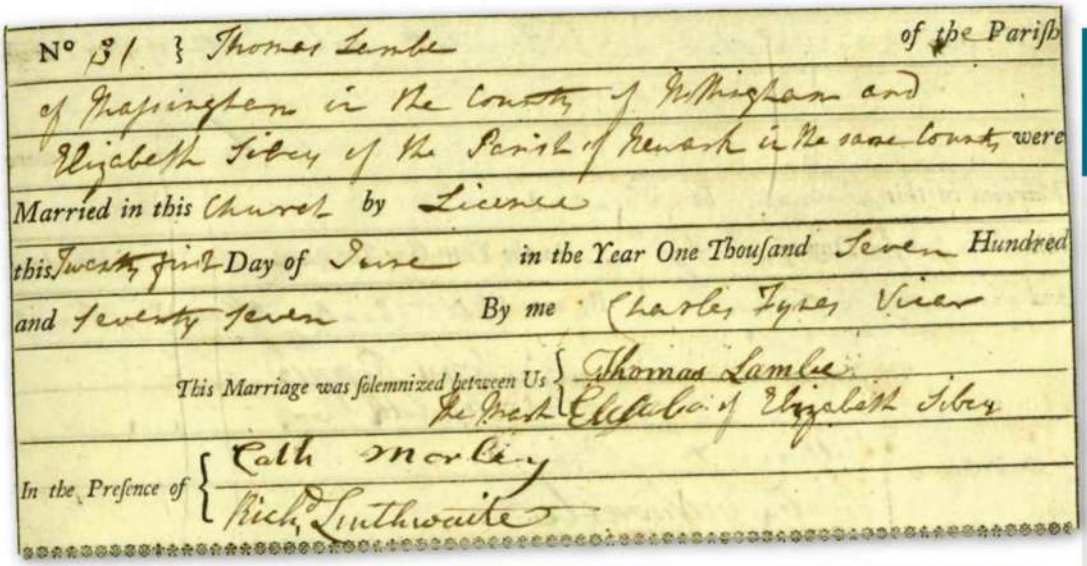
4 Mother's Details
The fourth column provides the same information for the mother.

5 Birthdate
The last two columns note both the child's date of birth and the date that the baptism was performed.

6 James' Grandparents
This entry reveals that James Glenn's grandfather John Glenn was from "the Shire of Anguish in Scotland", and James' grandmother was named "Mardereorum" – a corruption of Mordocheum (Mordecai)?

being against the duty, erred on the side of his parishioner.

William Dade (c1740–1790) was a Church of England clergyman in Yorkshire, and included extra information in the parish registers, particularly for baptisms and burials, than was usually recorded. Impressed, the Archbishop of York required this to be done in every parish beginning in 1777, although few clergymen consistently complied. As a result, many parish registers in Yorkshire dating between 1777 and 1812 contain additional genealogical details. These so-called 'Dade Registers' can also be found in a few parishes in Cheshire, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Gloucestershire, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire and Surrey. A list can be found at the website Discovering ▶


N° 31 } Thomas Lamb of the Parish
of Mapperley in the County of Nottingham and
Elizabeth Sibey of the Parish of Newark in the same County were
Married in this Church by Licence
this Twenty first Day of June in the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred
and Seventy Seven By me Charles Tyers Vicar
This Marriage was solemnized between Us } Thomas Lamb
the Mark } Elizabeth Sibey
In the Presence of { Cath Morley
Richd Southwoute

An example of a post-1753 marriage register entry from the parish of St Mary Magdalene, Newark, Nottinghamshire, 1777

▶ English Ancestors, run by Brigham Young University in Utah, USA: **englishancestors.byu.edu/Pages/dade-registers.** A similar scheme developed in the Diocese of Durham under the direction of Bishop Shute Barrington, and these 'Barrington Registers' were introduced c1798.

The 18th century passed with no significant change to register keeping, and the majority of parish registers of baptisms and burials continued to include just the most basic of information. Finally, in January 1813, an Act for the Better Regulating, and Preserving of Parish and Other Registers of Births, Baptisms, Marriages and Burials in England came into effect. Introduced by politician George Rose (see the box) and popularly know as 'Rose's Act', the legislation's main purpose was to "greatly facilitate the proof of pedigrees claiming to be entitled to real or personal property, and be otherwise of great public benefit and advantage".

Standardisation

The most important consequence of Rose's Act was the introduction of standard printed forms for the recording of baptisms and burials. For the former, in addition to the date and the child's name, the names of both parents were to be given along with their abode and the occupation of the father. Significantly the date of birth was not a requirement, although in many cases this was added. For burials, in addition to the deceased's name and date of burial, their age and abode were to be included.

The overwhelming majority of surviving parish registers are now to be found in the local county archive or record office. Discovering precisely what has survived and the availability of copies (digital or otherwise), transcripts and indexes is, as they say, another story. Many are available on commercial genealogical records websites such as Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), MyHeritage (**myheritage.com**), Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**). Others are on free sites such as FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) and FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**). The best resources for discovering what registers do survive are either the county archive/record office's own website and online catalogue, or the county series of the National Index of Parish Registers. This is published by the Society of Genealogists, and available to members of the society via its website (**sog.org.uk**).

The legislation's main purpose was to 'greatly facilitate the proof of pedigrees'

TOP TIP!

Many parishioners were unable to spell their names. The information recorded in the register will frequently be phonetically accurate but far from letter-perfect.

PAUL BLAKE is a genealogist specialising in Gibraltar research, and the author of several books including *Tracing Your Insolvent Ancestors* (Pen & Sword, 2019)

Resources

Take your research further

ARTICLE

From Rose's Bill to Rose's Act: a Reappraisal of the 1812 Parish Register Act
Stuart A Gietel-Basten
Local Population Studies Vol. 76, Spring 2006
This assessment of the 1812 Act and its ramifications can be read for free on the website of the Local Population Studies Society: **tinyurl.com/lps-basten**.

BOOKS

Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: a Reassessment
Rebecca Probert
Cambridge University Press, 2009
Here a regular contributor to *WDYTYA? Magazine* examines the causes and effects of the 1753 Clandestine Marriages Act.

The Parish Chest: a Study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England
William E Tate
Cambridge University Press, 1946
The 1969 third edition of this essential study can be borrowed for free from the Internet Archive (**tinyurl.com/arch-tate-chest**).

Tracing Your Ancestors' Parish Records
Stuart A Raymond
Pen & Sword, 2015
This crucial guide discusses the registers of baptisms, marriages and burials.

WEBSITE

DISCOVERY
w **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**
The National Archives at Kew's catalogue provides descriptions of records held by TNA itself and more than 3,500 other archives.

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By Roberta Estes

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By Elizabeth Shown Mills

Scottish Baronial Families 1250–1750
By Dr David Dobson

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By Val D. Greenwood

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GETTY IMAGES

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A family unable to pay their rent because of the Famine are evicted from their cottage

The Irish Famine

Jonathan Scott shares online resources to research kin who were affected by the Famine

The latest series of *WDYTYA?* saw writer, actor and comedian Aisling Bea discover that her family lived through some of the most dramatic periods in Irish history. This included the devastating Famine of 1845–1852 that resulted in the deaths of about one million people, and sparked mass migration to Canada, Australia, the USA and Great Britain.

The humble potato was the ideal crop for the working, rural poor. It was relatively easy to grow, there was usually a high yield, and by the 19th century it had become the staple food for Ireland's expanding population. Then in late 1845 a fungus-like microbe known as blight began ruining potato crops. Unlike previous crop failures this spread across the entire country, and returned, year after year.

The British government's role – enforcing the Corn Laws, blocking imports and preventing the starving from being able to afford alternative food; continuing to export food from Ireland; providing late, inadequate and mismanaged aid; and supporting mass evictions by English landlords – only served to strengthen the independence movement.

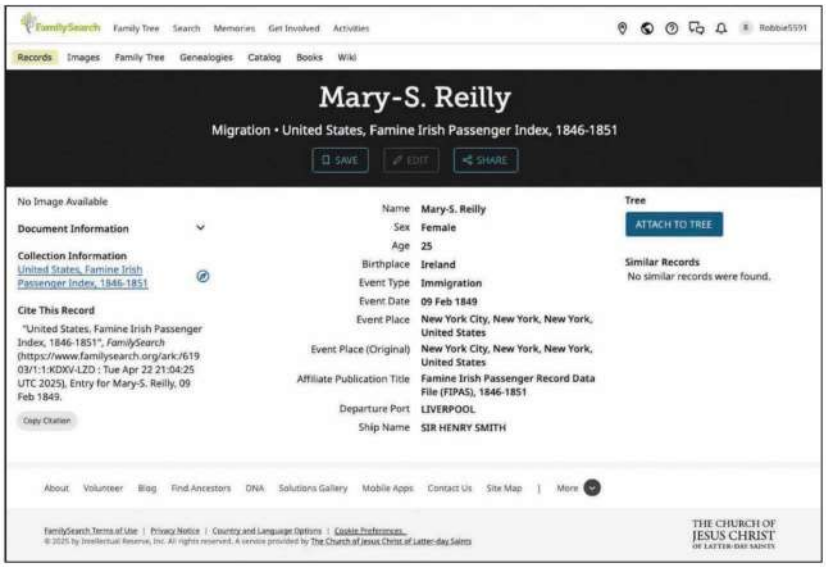
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF IRELAND

W **nationalarchives.ie/collections/genealogy-website/**

The NAI's genealogy portal has a number of important and free-to-use primary sources. Tithe Applotment Books, for example, were compiled between 1823 and 1837 in order to determine how much occupiers of agricultural holdings should pay in tithes to the Church of Ireland, and so offer a snapshot of land use in the pre-Famine period. Other relevant collections include the 'Distress Papers', a collection of letters, reports and petitions sent from stricken parts of the country. There are also records of the Relief Commission, a government agency that managed famine relief. Finally there are Poor Law records – one estimate suggests that the Famine had forced almost 4 per cent of the population into workhouses by March 1851.

GETTY IMAGES

BEST WEBSITES



FAMILYSEARCH

w **familysearch.org/en/search/collection/2110821**

During and after the Famine, successive generations sought a better life in the USA. In the 1980s Ira Glazier and Michael Tepper compiled the seven-volume work *Famine Immigrants* (Genealogical Publishing, 1983–1986), documenting Irish migrants arriving at the Port of New York between 1846 and 1851. You can search the index here, which is also on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**). From the 1850s, New York City and state officials created the country's first immigration station: the Emigrant Landing Depot at Castle Garden. In 1892 this was replaced by Ellis Island. Passenger lists for both are also available via FamilySearch.

THE NATIONAL FAMINE WAY

w **nationalfamineway.ie**

The National Famine Way is a 103-mile trail following the footsteps of the Strokestown tenants – 1,490 people who, in 1847, marched from County Roscommon to Dublin after being evicted by English landlords for failing to pay their rent. Pairs of bronze children's shoe sculptures are interspersed along the route. They then journeyed to North America on so-called 'coffin ships'. You can find out more information here, while the Irish National Famine Museum in Strokestown (**strokestownpark.ie**) is tracing the stories of the 'Missing 1,490', which are being used in regional history projects known collectively as Great Famine Voices (**greatfaminevoices.ie**).

EXPERT'S CHOICE

Nicola Morris is an Irish genealogist, director of Timeline Research (**timeline.ie**) and a regular contributor to the *WDYTYA?* series

Even single-room cottages are in Griffith's Valuation

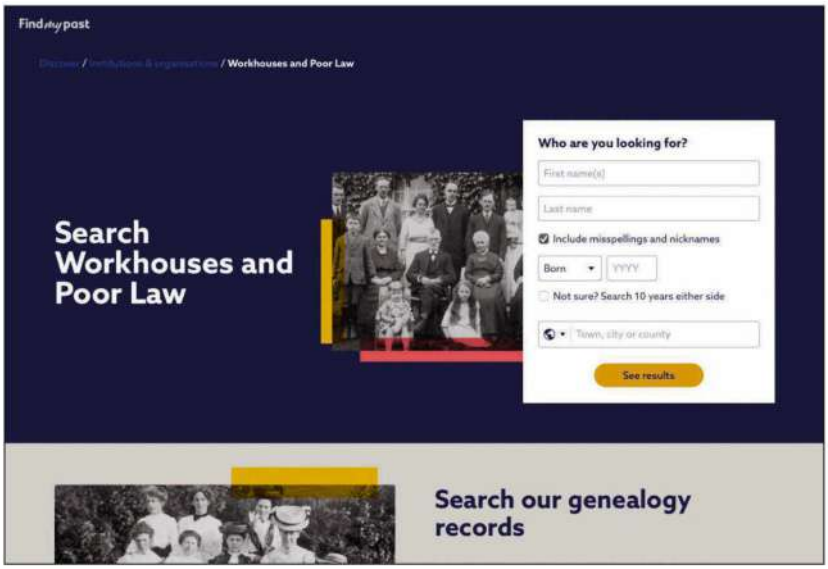
The website Ask About Ireland (**askaboutireland.ie**), published by the Irish agency Libraries Development, hosts one of the most important genealogical sources for the immediate post-Famine period. Griffith's Valuation was a nationwide survey of property undertaken between 1847 and 1864. Due to the loss of the records of the 1841, 1851 and 1861 Irish census, it acts as a valuable census substitute. It is the only comprehensive nationwide record that documents the location of a family during and just after the Great Famine.

The valuation includes nearly all households, from those in a single-room cottage to large landed estates, but is missing the occupiers of urban tenements and shepherds who were accommodated by their employer. The records provide the name of the head of household, their landlord and a description of the property.

On the same pages you will also find the Valuation Office maps, illustrating the boundaries of each property. In addition, there are links to the Ordnance Survey name books, which were compiled by surveyors and Irish-language experts in the 1830s. This little corner of the website offers the family historian an opportunity to investigate the very few primary sources that document the population and describe the landscape at the time of the Great Famine.

However, this is not the only valuable resource here. Visit the 'Reading Room' for a link to 'History and Heritage' content including a wealth of insightful essays and publications, historic and contemporary. Typing 'famine' in the search box will reveal a long list of links to articles, museums and resources for teaching – a useful starting point for anyone who is unfamiliar with the subject.

GETTY IMAGES



FINDMYPAST

w **bit.ly/fmp-workhouses-poor-law**

Findmypast's partnership with the NAI has opened up a number of Poor Law collections from the period. There are 1.5 million Dublin workhouse admission and discharge registers covering 1840–1919, with similar collections for Clare, Donegal, Galway, Sligo and Waterford. Findmypast also has the collection 'Ireland, Poverty Relief Loans 1821–1874' based on material from The National Archives in Kew. Loan-application forms include the name of the borrower, as well as occupation, health, family circumstances and whether the borrower emigrated. You can learn more about the site's resources for this topic at **findmypast.co.uk/blog/history/irish-famine**.

IRISH FAMINE MEMORIAL SYDNEY

w **irishfaminememorial.org**

This monument can be found at the Hyde Park Barracks on Macquarie Street in Sydney, Australia. It commemorates the arrival of more than 4,000 young, single women, most of whom were teenage orphans, who migrated through a British government initiative to alleviate overcrowding in Irish workhouses and deal with a severe shortage of women in the British colony. The website includes a free database of the orphan girls, which records their first and last names, home in Ireland, age on arrival, names of parents, religion, and the name of the ship on which they travelled: **irishfaminememorial.org/orphans/database/**.

Go Further

Eight more websites if you have Irish roots

ANCESTRY

w **bit.ly/anc-ireland-famine-relief**

The collection 'Ireland, Famine Relief Commission Papers, 1844–1847' holds the names of committee members, often landlords, parish priests and ministers, plus local donors.

DUNBRODY FAMINE SHIP

w **dunbrody.com**

The famine ship is a reproduction emigrant vessel moored at the quayside of New Ross, County Wexford. The website has a database of emigrants (downloading an entry costs €10).

FITZWILLIAM TENANTS

w **tinyurl.com/fitzwilliam-tenants**

Emigrants from County Wicklow's Fitzwilliam Estate (1847–1856) are listed on this free PDF.

GREAT FAMINE VOICES: LIVERPOOL

w **greatfaminevoices.ie/liverpool/**

This example of the aforementioned Great Famine Voices project features videos telling the story of Irish migrants who came to Liverpool.

IMIRCE

w **https://imirce.universityofgalway.ie/p/ms**

Here you can search and view thousands of letters from Irish emigrants to North America.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

w **tinyurl.com/lac-grosse**

This database contains 33,036 references to Irish immigrants who stayed, were born, married or buried at the Grosse Île Quarantine Station in Quebec (1832–1937).

MELLON CENTRE FOR MIGRATION STUDIES

w **qub.ac.uk/cms**

Here you can read about the creation of the emigration database at **www.dippam.ac.uk**.

VIRTUAL RECORD TREASURY OF IRELAND

w **virtualtreasury.ie**

View resources held by the Public Record Office of Ireland in Dublin, destroyed in 1922.

Sheriff Court Paternity Records

Scottish Indexes' **Emma Maxwell**, who appears in Diane Morgan's episode of *WDYTYA?*, shares her tips for using these important resources

As far back as medieval times, unmarried women in Scotland could take the fathers of their children to court to force them to pay maintenance towards the expenses incurred during birth and her subsequent care of their children. Historically, the term 'illegitimate' was used to describe children born out of wedlock; you may see the phrase 'natural child' too. Illegitimacy was common in 19th-century Scotland – as many as 10 per cent of the births between 1861 and 1865 were illegitimate – so the records are very useful for family historians.

Note that these are effectively debt cases. If a private arrangement was made to care for the child, there would be no need for a court case because there would be no debt.

Free Representation

The Scottish courts had a provision for those who through poverty could not pursue or defend a case. Legal agents were available at each court to represent the poor, and they provided their services free of charge. This means that even very poor women could pursue the father of their child in court.

In the 19th century, paternity cases were predominantly heard at sheriff courts

In the 19th century, paternity cases were predominantly heard at sheriff courts, which are the principal local civil and criminal court in Scotland. A study of the sheriff-court records in the south of Scotland shows that for the year 1858, just under 15 per cent of illegitimate births had some kind of record. This type of case is usually described as an "action of affiliation and aliment". The court determined who the father was (the affiliation), then stipulated how much he should pay towards the care of his child (the aliment), and for how long.

The decisions of the court were known as 'decrees', or 'decreets'. If the defender (usually the father) did not abide by the decree then he could be sent to prison. When an 'extract' (an official copy) was requested, this was known as an 'extract decree'.

From about 1830, most sheriff courts began to record these in volumes of extracted

Extracted Decree, 1847

1 Date
Diane Morgan's 4x great grandmother's case was heard on 2 and 23 March.

2 Surnames
The surnames of the opposing parties, Isabella Hope and George Rome, are recorded in the margin.

3 Designations
Rather than only giving the pursuer and defender's full names, their designations usually add the residence and occupation, if they had one.

4 £2 2/
Isabella is awarded £2 2s to cover "inlying charges attending the birth".

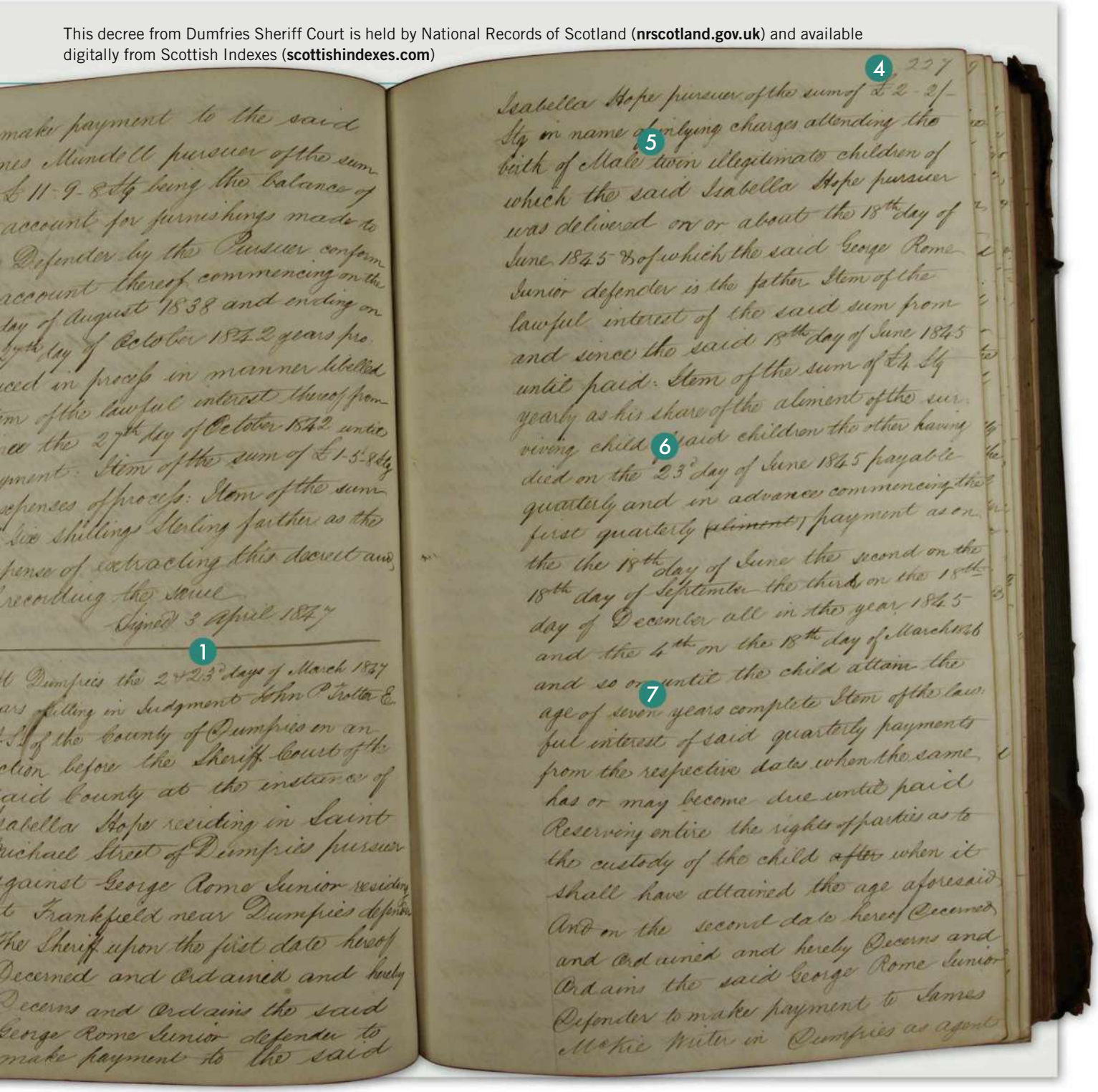
5 Children
We are told that Isabella had twin boys, although their names are not given. The date of birth, however, is recorded.

6 Date Of Death
Aliment was only due for the period that a child lived. One of Isabella's twins has died and we are given the date of death, which is not recorded in parish registers.

7 Duration
It was not unusual for the aliment (in this case £4 annually, paid in equal instalments four times a year) to be paid for the child's first seven years, as here, but it could be up to 14 years.

CROWN COPYRIGHT/NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND

This decree from Dumfries Sheriff Court is held by National Records of Scotland (**nrscotland.gov.uk**) and available digitally from Scottish Indexes (**scottishindexes.com**)



make payment to the said
nes Mundell pursuer of the sum
£11-9-8½d being the balance of
account for furnishings made to
Defender by the Pursuer conform
account thereof commencing on the
day of August 1838 and ending on
7th day of October 1842 years pre
ced in process in manner libelled
m of the lawful interest thereof from
ce the 27th day of October 1842 until
yment: Item of the sum of £1-5-8½d
xpenses of process: Item of the sum
Six shillings Sterling farther as the
pense of extracting this decreet and
recording the same
Signed 3 April 1847

1

d Dumfries the 22 & 23rd days of March 1847
ars sitting in Judgment John Porter E
S of the County of Dumfries on an
ction before the Sheriff Court of the
said County at the instance of
Isabella Hope residing in Saint
Michael Street of Dumfries pursuer
against George Rome Junior residing
t Frankfield near Dumfries defender
the Sheriff upon the first date hereof
Decerned and Ordained and hereby
Decerns and Ordains the said
George Rome Junior defender to
make payment to the said

4

Isabella Hope pursuer of the sum of £2-2/-
Sg in name of lying charges attending the
birth of Male twin illegitimate children of
which the said Isabella Hope pursuer
was delivered on or about the 18th day of
June 1845 to which the said George Rome
Junior defender is the father Item of the
lawful interest of the said sum from
and since the said 18th day of June 1845
until paid: Item of the sum of £4 Sg
yearly as his share of the aliment of the sur
viving child 5 said children the other having
died on the 23rd day of June 1845 payable
quarterly and in advance commencing the
first quarterly ~~aliment~~ payment as on
the the 18th day of June the second on the
18th day of September the third on the 18th
day of December all in the year 1845
and the 4th on the 18th day of March 1846
and so on until the child attain the
age of seven 6 years complete Item of the law
ful interest of said quarterly payments
from the respective dates when the same
has or may become due until paid
Reserving entire the rights of parties as to
the custody of the child ~~after~~ when it
shall have attained the age aforesaid
And on the second date hereof Decerned
and Ordained and hereby Decerns and
Ordains the said George Rome Junior
Defender to make payment to James
M'Kie Writer in Dumfries as agent

decrees. These are a useful resource, because the survival rate of these volumes is high. An extracted decree will usually give key information such as when the child was born, who the parents were, and how much the father was to pay and for how long.

As well as the decree, there are also more detailed records known as 'court processes'. A court process is essentially the entire official paperwork relating to a case. Processes are not in neat volumes; instead, the loose paperwork is tied up and stored in archival boxes. In her *WDYTYA?* episode Diane Morgan uses these processes to investigate her 4x great grandmother Isabella Hope's sheriff-court case against the father of her twin boys. The actor and writer uncovers George Rome's defence plus witness statements, and the decree is our annotated document.

Circumstances vary, but it's not unusual for these records to be extensive. In researching for our website Scottish Indexes (**scottishindexes.com**), we have found many letters between pursuers and defenders that were used as evidence.

Burden Of Proof

Because of the nature of these cases, establishing sufficient proof was

In the 19th century impoverished mothers could pursue the father of an illegitimate baby through Scotland's sheriff courts

▶ challenging. *Juramentum suppletorium*, which had been used in medieval times, was reintroduced. This term translates as 'supplementary oath'. This oath would be taken by the person on whom the burden of proof rested. In these cases, that would be the mother of the child. She would take an oath naming the father and that, along with any other incomplete or circumstantial evidence, could be accepted as proof. Legal historians have pointed out that this situation was advantageous to the woman who was pursuing a case of this nature.

When no official copy of a decree was requested, it was not extracted. Until 1860, these cases can only be found within the boxes of court processes along with the extracted cases. Sadly, between 1860 and about 1900, relatively few court processes survive.

Free Online Index

A growing index to these records is available through the Scottish Paternity Index on Scottish Indexes' website, which now includes more than 42,000 cases from across Scotland: **scottishindexes.com/paternitysearch.aspx**. So far, the majority of cases are post-1830. The index includes extracted decrees and processes, and my company can provide images of the full record in exchange for a research fee of £5.

Historic sheriff-court records are preserved by National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh (NRS; **nrscotland.gov.uk**), with the exception of those from Orkney and Shetland which are held at the respective local-authority archives. NRS has not itself indexed or digitised these records, although the online catalogue is comprehensive: **catalogue.nrscotland.gov.uk/nrsonlinecatalogue/welcome.aspx**. The catalogue, however, does not list every case individually by the name of the pursuer and defender. Within the catalogue the records are arranged by the name of the court, type of record and then date.

TOP TIP!

In these court cases the children are rarely named, although their date of birth and sex are always recorded. So when looking for cases, search for the parents, not the child.

Resources

Take your research further

WEBSITES

SCOTLANDSPEOPLE

w **www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/help-and-support/guides/registering-illegitimate-births**

This online guide explains how 'illegitimate' births were recorded, and when the use of the term was finally discontinued.

SCOTTISH INDEXES

w **scottishindexes.com/learningcourt.aspx**

Here you can learn how to find paternity cases in sheriff-court records. Terms are explained, and you can download an example case.

WDYTYA? MAGAZINE

w **whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com/tutorials/religious/kirk-session-records-scotland**

Alongside the civil courts, Church of Scotland kirk-session records are also useful when searching for the father of an illegitimate Scottish child. In this article on the magazine's website Chris Paton explains how you can search them.

EMMA MAXWELL is a genealogist, co-founded Scottish Indexes (**scottishindexes.com**) and hosts the online Scottish Indexes Conferences – the next one is on 13 September

GETTY IMAGES

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Q&A

Our team of experts offers tips and inspiration Edited By Claire Vaughan

Anthony Adolph is a professional genealogist and the author of 11 books

Katherine Cobb is a member of AGRA based in Somerset

Nicola Morris is a genealogist based in Dublin (**timeline.ie**)

Jayne Shrimpton is a professional dress historian and portrait specialist

Alan Stewart is a family history writer, and author of *Grow Your Own Family Tree*

Steve Thomas is a genealogist with over 20 years' experience

Phil Tomaselli is a military family history expert and author

How can I find John Rafferty in Irish records?

Q My great great grandfather, John Rafferty, was born in Roscommon between 1818 and 1823 and married Sarah c1843. James Rafferty (born 1846), their eldest son, migrated to Birmingham. He married in 1866, and on the certificate John was recorded as a farmer, deceased.

Sarah Rafferty, widow (born 1823) is on the 1871 census in Birmingham with son Michael William Rafferty (born 1852), my great grandfather; and daughter, Ellen Beatrice Rafferty (born 1860/1). Sarah is recorded as Head, so John must have died 1861–1866, I presume in Ireland, and Sarah came over with her children to join James in Birmingham.

Where in Roscommon did John (and Sarah) come from?

Josephine Goddard

A The Primary Valuation of Ireland, commonly known as Griffith's Valuation, was a nationwide survey of property undertaken between 1847 and 1864 for the purpose of assessing the rate of taxation. Since the majority of 19th-century Irish census returns have been destroyed, the survey acts as a mid-century census substitute.

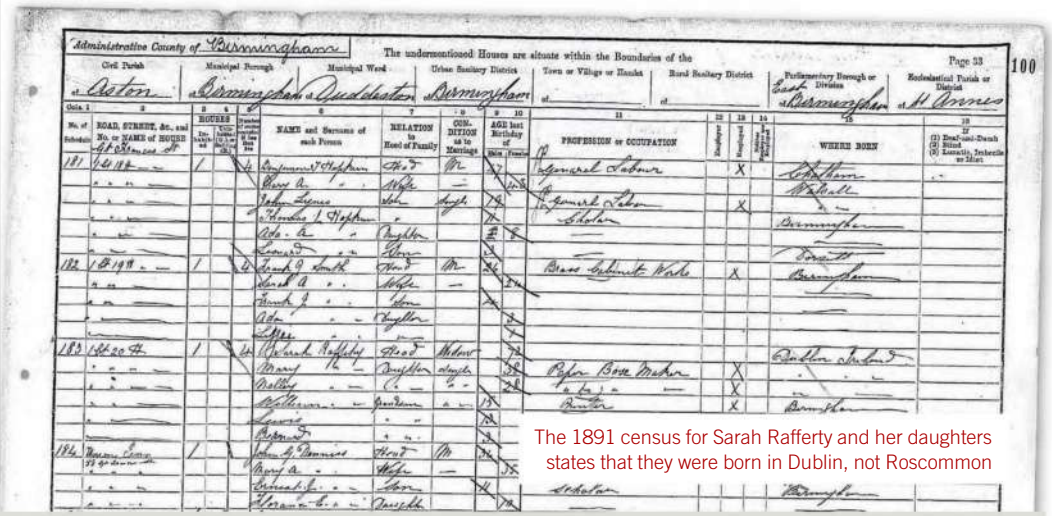
If John Rafferty was a farmer, he likely leased land. If he was alive c1860, when his youngest daughter was born, then he should appear in the valuation, which is available at Ask About Ireland (**askaboutireland.ie**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**).

Griffith's Valuation enumerated two men named John Rafferty in County Roscommon in 1857, in the townlands of Carrownalassan, civil parish of Kilbride; and Urrasaun, Tibohine civil parish. Both men leased land, indicating that they were farmers. However, death registrations for both in the late 1870s and 1880s rule them out. Sarah Rafferty's husband was deceased when she settled in Birmingham before April 1871.

The 1891 English census for Sarah Rafferty and her two daughters, Mary (born c1852) and Nellie (born c1863) in Aston, Warwickshire, stated they were born in Dublin rather than Roscommon. There were John Rafferty households in Dublin at the time of Griffith's Valuation, but none appears to lease land, appropriate for a farmer.

I recommend obtaining marriage certificates for all of Sarah's children who married in England, to confirm their father's name and occupation. If he was consistently recorded as a farmer, he should appear in Griffith's Valuation and you may need to work methodically through each identified John Rafferty land holding to find a match to your family. Once you have established townland addresses for John Rafferty, you can use the place-name guide at the site Irish Ancestors (**johngrenham.com**) to identify corresponding church baptismal registers, which you can search for evidence of children born to John Rafferty with a wife Sarah.

Nicola Morris



The 1891 census for Sarah Rafferty and her daughters states that they were born in Dublin, not Roscommon

HAVE YOU HIT A BRICK WALL? Please email your questions or family photographs to the following address: **wdytyaquestions@ourmedia.co.uk**

If selected, your query will be answered on these pages. Please note that we receive a large volume of correspondence each month, and cannot reply to each message individually. You are more likely to receive a response if you keep the question and background information concise (no more than 150 words), with a clear goal of enquiry.

Which is the right birth registration of Phoebe Eames?

217	Twelfth September 1848 Merlins Yard Hillingdon	Phabe Filby	Girl	William Filby Eames	Sarah Eames formerly Barrett	Bricklayer	Sarah Eames Mother Merlins Yard Hillingdon	Ninth October 1848	Francis Stockwell Registrar

This birth record for Phabe Filby Eames is the most promising option for Dawn Tucker to research further, according to our genealogist Katherine Cobb

Q I'm looking for Phoebe Eames' birth record. Census records (1871–1911) give her birth year as 1848–1852 born in: Missenden; Lambeth; Dover; London and Great Missenden, with mother's name Sarah. She gives two different fathers' names on her three marriage records (James Eames and William Lark), and provides three different maiden names on her children's birth registrations (Lark, Philbey and also Eames).

I've found three possible birth records: Phoebe Filby in 1848, St Pancras; Phabe Filby Eames in 1848, Uxbridge Union; or Phoebe Philbey 1855, Amersham. Which is correct?
Dawn Tucker

A Phoebe seems unsure of details of her birth and father. She may have moved frequently in childhood, while uncertainty about her father's name may indicate a stepfather, but could be an attempt to hide illegitimacy. The various spellings of Eames and Philbey further complicate matters.

When faced with discrepancies, listing all possibilities and researching each one can help eliminate some. The 1855 Phoebe Philbey registration seemed improbable, since Phoebe married in 1867; however, I included it in case it was a late entry in the registers. The records show that this Phoebe was baptised at Great Missenden in 1855, the daughter of James and Sophia, and probably died in 1872. I also found the baptism of Phoebe Filby born at St Pancras in 1848. The daughter of Henry and Mary, she married in 1865, so we can rule her out.

Phabe Filby Eames was born at Hillingdon in 1848 to William Filby Eames and Sarah. This looks promising, although the father's name differs from that given at Phoebe's first marriage. The mother's name is as expected. Before assuming this is 'your' Phoebe, I suggest searching for her and her mother in the 1851/1861 censuses. Since not all births were registered at that time, and coverage of Buckinghamshire baptisms on subscription sites is incomplete, try obtaining the published Great Missenden registers or requesting a baptisms search; details are available on the Buckinghamshire Family History Society's website (**https://www.bucksfhs.org.uk**).
Katherine Cobb

How do I uncover a POW's experiences in a Japanese camp?

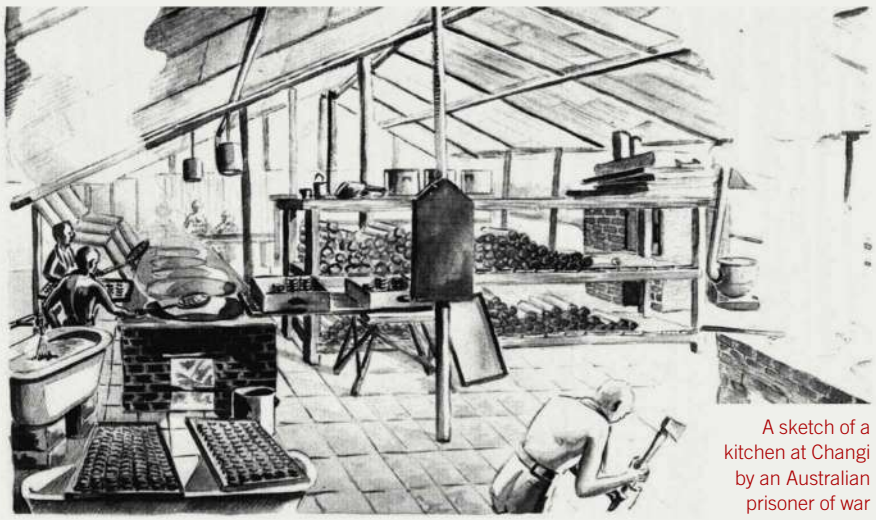
Q I'm trying to help my friend find her dad's prisoner of war military records. Unfortunately, she does not have his Army Number. He was Sergeant Andrew Cheyne Donaldson, born 8 June 1918 in Scotland to Andrew Donaldson and Isabella (née Cheyne). He was in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) and captured in 1943 by the Japanese, but survived Changi Camp.
Carolyn Johnston

A Sadly, I can find nothing on Andrew and his captivity in the digital record. I *did* find his wedding on 4 January 1943 in Falkirk. This was probably just before he was sent to Burma.

He's not obvious in Findmypast's huge 'Prisoners of War 1715–1945' collection at **bit.ly/fmp-pows**, nor can I find a POW card – although the Japanese didn't always report their prisoners. I've also searched a large number of paper records, such as missing REME soldier files, with no luck.

REME records for the Second World War are, supposedly, on Ancestry in 'UK, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Service Records, 1942–1959' (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62682**). It clearly states, "Only records of service members born over 100 years ago have been published, with more released annually as they exceed 100 years since birth." Despite his birthdate Andrew isn't there, and searching over 300 Smith surnames suggests that no records have been opened for births after 1912.

So you'll need to apply to The National Archives (TNA) at Kew for a copy of his service record. This can be done digitally (see **https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mod-open-foi-request-step1**), but proof of death must be supplied and you may be charged. The full name is required, and I'd suggest you give date and place of birth and regiment (REME). You should, fairly quickly, be told whether TNA has a record then receive a digital copy in due course, but the last REME service record I applied for took nearly 15 months to arrive.
Phil Tomaselli



A sketch of a kitchen at Changi by an Australian prisoner of war

GETTY IMAGES

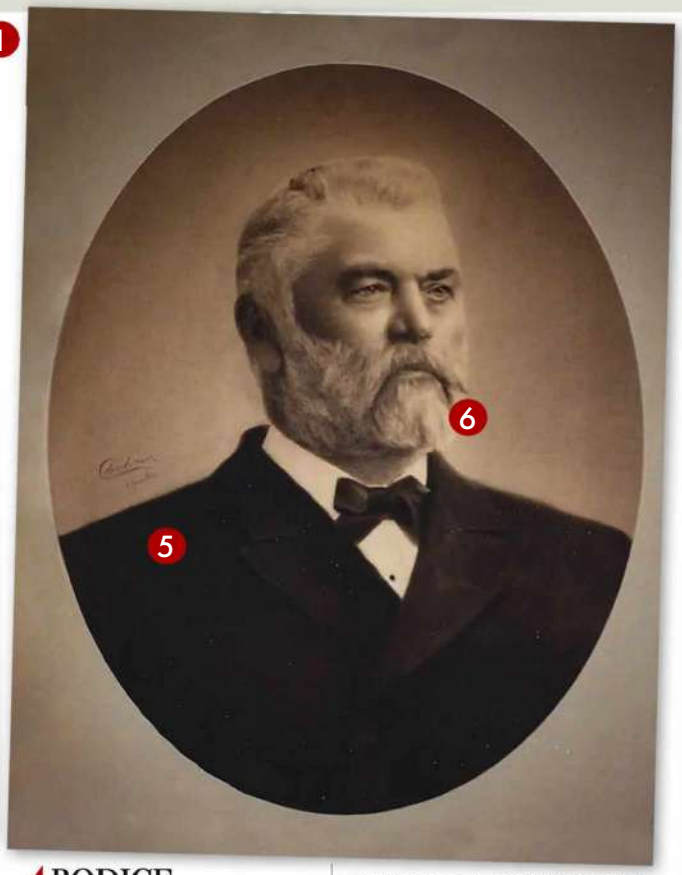
Picture Analysis

Which Hoodless ancestors do these pictures show?

Q It's thought that the man in this photo is my ancestor John Hoodless (born 1786 in Cumberland), who went to Canada in 1842 and died there in 1870. His wife, Sarah, died in 1832 in Cumberland, so the other photo is not her. However, I'm wondering if they might actually show John's son or grandson and wife. Can you help?
Adrian Hoodless

A These pictures appear to be paired or 'companion' photographs created around the same time, although I cannot decipher the matching signatures they bear. These names should denote the photographer or studio, which with research could reveal approximately when these copies were made. For these are not original photos, but – going by their soft image quality – are subtly retouched enlargements of smaller originals. Although these enlargements may have been produced at the time of the sitting, they were more likely commissioned some years later, perhaps even following the deaths of the sitters. Family photographs were often enlarged and retouched to create more substantial portraits for displaying in large frames or on the wall at home.

We can estimate when these photographs were taken from their subjects' appearance. They are both well dressed; the lady's formal daytime costume indicates a firm timeframe of c1885–1890, and the man's attire also accords well with that period. The couple look to be in their 40s/early 50s, so clearly they cannot be John and Sarah – but could well represent John's grandson and his wife.
Jayne Shrimpton



1 Companion photographs
Victorian ancestors often posed for separate companion photos to mark a milestone wedding anniversary. This middle-aged couple may be celebrating their silver (25th) anniversary.

2 Day cap
Her lacy white day cap, a matronly accessory by the late 1800s, displays the tall crown characteristic of female headwear from the mid-1880s to the early 1890s.

3 Neckline
The 1880s neckline, which often revealed the white pie-crust frill of the under-blouse, was usually accessorised with a metal brooch and sometimes a short, chunky locket on a chain.

4 Bodice
The lady's tight-fitting, narrow-sleeved bodice, fashioned from handsome figured fabric (an early form of devoré velvet), is typical of the mid-to-late 1880s/c1890.

5 Frock coat
The male sitter has a formal frock coat with a fashionable high neckline: a smart, traditional garment favoured by businessmen, professionals and for special occasions among the middle and upper classes.

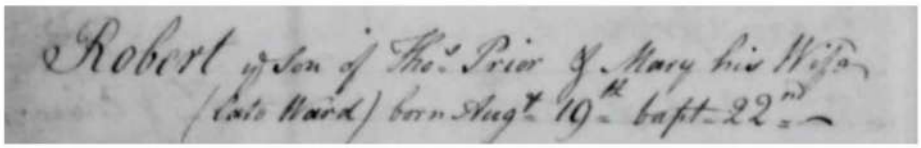
6 Facial hair
The man's generous facial hair has been clipped to follow the line of the jaw. This style of beard and moustache was popularised by the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII).

How do I track down my 18th-century Norfolk ancestors?

Q My ancestor Mary Ward, born c1768 in Norfolk, had two children with Thomas Prior: Susannah and Robert Prior, both born in Beetley, Norfolk. I need help with finding the parents of both Thomas and Mary, their baptisms and marriage record.
Wendy Catchpole

A Fortunately, the parish records for Beetley are very well covered: Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**) and TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) all hold not only the original parish records, but also the transcripts sent to the local archdeacon six years out of seven, and given to the bishop on his visitation in the seventh year.

The baptism records show that Susannah Prior, the daughter of Thomas Prior and Mary his wife (née Ward), was born on 6 September and baptised on 14 September in 1788. Their son Robert Prior was born on 19 August and baptised on 22 August in 1796. Both children were born and baptised in the small parish of Beetley. Thomas Prior, their father, was buried there on 15 December 1822, aged 65.


Robert ye Son of Thos. Prior & Mary his Wife (late Ward) born Aug.t 19th bapt. 22nd

The record of the baptism of Thomas and Mary Prior's son Robert on 22 August 1796

Using Ancestry and Findmypast, I could find no marriage anywhere in the UK between a Thomas Prior and a Mary Ward, although I did find the marriage of a Thomas Prior and Mary Prison (sic) in St Andrew's Church, Halstead, Essex, on 4 November 1783.

The difficulty in finding the marriage of Thomas and Mary may be because: (a) they never married, despite what is stated on their children's baptism records; (b) they married in a nonconformist chapel; or (c) they married in a Roman Catholic church.

I wondered whether Thomas and Mary had had any other children in Beetley between 1788 and 1796 who might have died in childbirth, but I could find neither relevant baptisms nor burials. I did find a possible baptism of a Thomas Pryor on 13 February 1758 in the parish of Edwardstone, Suffolk, with parents Thomas and Susan Pryor. I also found about 20 Mary Ward baptisms in Norfolk between 1765 and 1775.

The genealogy website GENUKI has a page with links to Norfolk cemeteries, censuses, church records, directories, maps and voting registers that you may find helpful: **genuki.org.uk/big/eng/NFK/Parish_Links**.
Alan Stewart

TOP TIP If you can't find someone in pre-census records then look for family connections. In this case, Wendy could search for other Wards and Priors in the area to see if there are possible relatives, and try to build family trees for them.

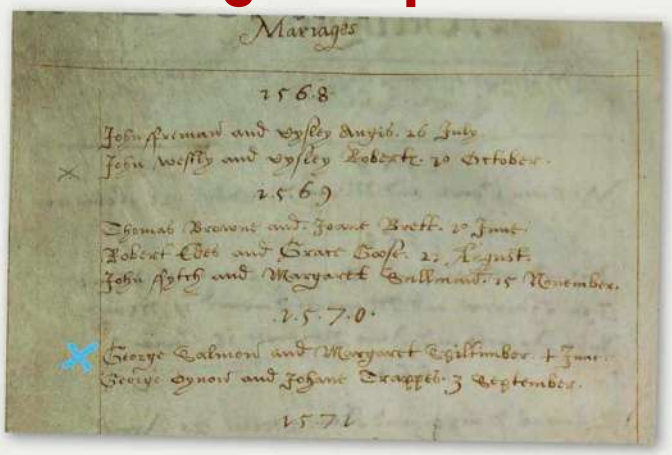
Can I get any further back than Margaret Spiltimber?

Q My Spiltimber family seems to have come from Essex in the 1500s. One of the earliest verifiable ancestors I can find is Margaret Spiltimber (born c1545, Great Sampford, Essex). I found the record of her marriage to George Salmon on 4 June 1570, Great Sampford, and her burial record dated 14 June 1614, Thaxted, Essex. How can I find out more?
Julie Wilkinson

A The details you have for Margaret's marriage and burial are as precise as we may expect for this period – names and dates only. They come from the early decades of parish registers – Great Sampford's do not begin until 1559.

If you're familiar with 16th-century research, you'll know that tracing further back isn't easy. "Born c1545, Great Sampford, Essex" is clearly a guess, perhaps necessitated by online family trees that refuse to allow a name to be entered without birth details, so take it with a pinch of salt.

However, Margaret is likely to have been from Great Sampford, so searches in the early registers, as well as any surviving manorial records, tax and militia lists, and the Essex wills (Great Sampford was under the Commissary Court of Essex and Hertfordshire) may reveal other Spiltimbers. You can then try to work out how they were related to each other. The 1573 will for John Spiltimber of Stambourne, eight miles from Great Sampford, may be worth checking out. As might that of Alice Spiltimber of Toppesfield six miles away and dated 1585. Both can be seen at Essex Archives Online (**essexarchivesonline.co.uk**).


Marriages
1568
John Freeman and Cysley Dunyib. 26 July
John Westly and Cysley Robertc. 20 October.
1569
Thomas Browne and Joane Brett. 10 June
Robert Cole and Grace Goose. 22 August
John Ashby and Margaret Gullmant. 15 November.
1570.
George Salmon and Margaret Spiltimber. 4 June.
George Gynors and Johane Drappell. 3 September.
1571

Margaret married George Salmon in 1570, but Julie wants to know more

The 'MasterSearch' facility at TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) reveals a host of references to Spiltimber from the 1500s and 1600s, almost all in Essex (especially Toppesfield), declining in the 1700s; maybe the family produced more girls than boys.

Surnames usually originate from parents' names, places, occupations or nicknames. Spiltimber is almost certainly a north-west Essex nickname for someone who spilt or spoiled a consignment of logs.
Anthony Adolph

Big Question

Can you help me with my Roye/ Foster brick wall?

FAYE SANDERS is having trouble identifying her great grandfather's parents

Q The birth certificate of my great grandfather, John Frank Roye Foster, says that his mother and father were John Roye Foster and Selina Foster (née Williams).

However, his 1905 marriage certificate says that his father was "William Foster, deceased". On Selina's death certificate, it also says that she was a widow of William Foster.

I can't find any record of a marriage for Selina to either John Roye Foster or William Foster, nor can I find any record of a John Roye Foster in the area at that time.

I have found a family in the right timeframe with twin brothers called John and William Foster. I recently got a new DNA match who has John Fice (born 1800), John and William Foster's grandfather, as an ancestor. I'm hoping this may confirm that one of the twins was John Frank Roye Foster's father.

How can I solve this mystery?

Faye Sanders

A It is not unusual for a child who had lost a father at a very young age to provide the name of a person who became their de facto father when they get married.

However, John Frank Roye Foster was 10 years or older when his putative father, also John Foster, drowned at sea in 1887. The father was a fisherman in inland waters, so we might presume he was home often enough for the son to know his name.

In family history research, few problems bring as much chaos to the narrative as the unreliable witness, and in Selina – the mother of John – we have a classic example.

In the 1871 census of East Stonehouse, Plymouth, she can be found aged 21 years, married, with a daughter, Minnie Foster, who died the following year. In 1881, she is aged 24 years, unmarried, with her son John Foster aged four years. In 1891, aged 30 and widowed, she is living with her son John aged 14 years.

John was recorded in the baptismal register of St Peter, Plymouth, as born on 4 November 1875 and baptised on 13 January 1876 as John Frank Roye, son of John Frank and Selina Roye. By the time it came to register the child the surname Foster had been added, and Selena reported that her maiden name was Williams.

Three things are consistent in her census history: she went by the name of Selina Foster, she was born in East Stonehouse, and she was a tailoress. Following up on any consistencies is essential. In fact, there is no Selina Williams born in East Stonehouse in 1850, 1857 or 1861, but there is a Selina Foster baptised in 1849, daughter of James Foster whose family originated in Buckland Monachorum, Devon, and seem unrelated to the Plymouth Fosters whose Fice DNA shows up in your family. Of a person named John Frank Roye senior, there is absolutely no trace.

It may be that at the crux of the deception was the desire to avoid any misconception that she and the father of her child were closely related, since both shared the surname Foster. The 19th century witnessed a rise in concerns about the health issues that were raised by consanguinity. She avoided declaring her true surname at the baptism and again at the registration of young John, and in 1871 said that she was married.

There were several William Fosters in the father's family, and we may wonder if she was nodding in the direction of the father when she said that her maiden name was Williams out of all the names she had to choose from.

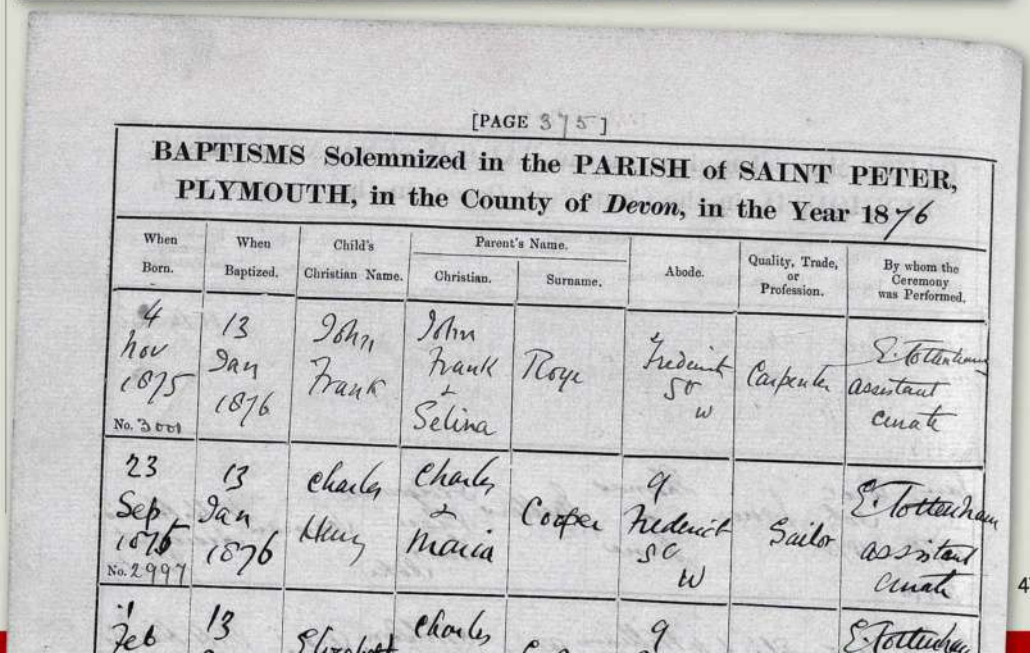
We might also wonder if she sought to cover her tracks by altering John's date of birth, which he consistently believed to be 26 January 1877, more than a year later than the 4 November 1875 on his birth certificate.

In fact, we might wonder among all this chaos whether these children were in fact the same person! John senior's twin brother, William, did not marry until the September quarter of 1876, so there was certainly a window of opportunity for one brother to supplant the other – and possibly even more reason for Selina to obfuscate the whole issue.

Steve Thomas

Few problems bring as much chaos to the narrative as the unreliable witness

363	Fourth November 1875 2 Anglesey Street	John Frank Roye	Boy	John Roye Foster	Selina Foster formerly Williams	Shifter Carpenter	Selina Foster Mother 2 Anglesey Street Plymouth	Fourth December 1875	J. P. Codd Registrar



[PAGE 375]

BAPTISMS Solemnized in the PARISH of SAINT PETER, PLYMOUTH, in the County of *Devon*, in the Year 1876

When Born.	When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parent's Name. Christian.	Parent's Name. Surname.	Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was Performed.
4 Nov 1875 No. 3001	13 Jan 1876	John Frank	John Frank & Selina	Roye	2 Frederick St W	Carpenter	E. Tottenham Assistant Curate
23 Sep 1875 No. 2997	13 Jan 1876	Charles Henry	Charles & Maria	Cooper	9 Frederick St W	Sailor	E. Tottenham Assistant Curate
1 Feb	13	Elizabeth	Charles	[illegible]	9		E. Tottenham

The records of John Frank Roye Foster's birth in 1875, and John Frank Roye's baptism in 1876

What regiment was my great grandfather in?

Q My great grandfather, George Rorison Gibson (born 5 November 1893, Port Glasgow, Scotland), is shown here on the back row, second from left. Can you tell me what the regiment is?
Alison Gardner

A This photo of recruits to The Royal Scots (TRS) was taken in 1915, probably at the Regimental Depot at Glencorse Barracks, south of Edinburgh. Clearly, George Rorison Gibson, a Glaswegian, enlisted (voluntarily) in TRS, an Edinburgh regiment, but early in the First World War recruiting parties went everywhere and TRS were proudly considered the oldest regiment in the British Army.

I can find no record for George Rorison Gibson, but there's a Medal Index Card (on Ancestry; **ancestry.co.uk**) for a George R Gibson serving in TRS with the regimental number 25746 who then transferred to the Labour Corps with the number 223465. Although the medal roll (also on Ancestry) gives his name as George Robson Gibson, I suspect that this is an error.

George's Labour Corps number (223465) indicates that he joined in about May 1917. The Long, Long Trail (**longlongtrail.co.uk**) says the 19th (Labour) Battalion, Royal Scots, disbanded in France at the end of May 1917 – the medal roll shows many TRS men transferring at the same time. As an early volunteer, he'd have been discharged early in 1919.

It's possible that George enlisted without giving his middle name. I did find several George Gibsons serving in TRS, but most can be discounted. You may want to check these yourself.
Phil Tomaselli

1 CAP BADGE

Although the cap badge isn't distinct, there are enough examples to show (when blown up) St Andrew, centre, with the Saltire Cross in front, a scroll beneath and the Order of the Thistle Star behind – the badge of The Royal Scots (TRS).

2 CAP

They all wear the Glengarry cap. Some have TRS' cap band, with its distinctive chequerboard pattern, and a bobble on top.

3 TUNIC

Some tunics have pocket pleats and some don't, indicating it's 1915 (they were temporarily left off to speed up production).

4 SHOULDER TITLE

None of the tunics has the curved brass shoulder title with "The Royal Scots" on it – a sure sign of early 1915 shortages.

5 BELT

A shortage of regulation square-buckle belts in 1915 meant that old-style snake-buckle belts came out of storage, as we can see here. Production of regular belts caught up with demand in 1916, but snake-buckle belts can still be seen later in the war.

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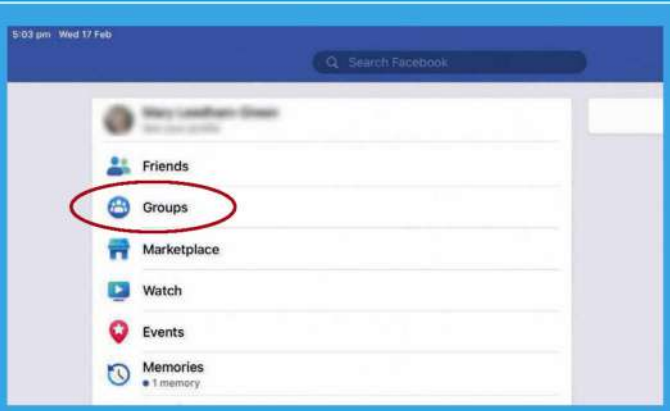

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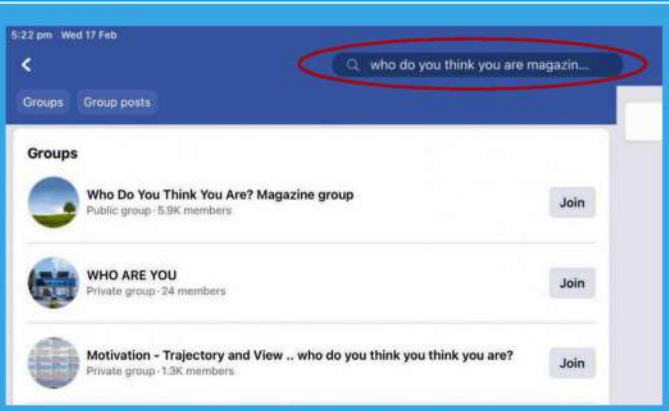
From the Facebook homepage, click on the 'Groups' icon (this may be at the bottom of the screen on the mobile app or from the menu, or above your News Feed).



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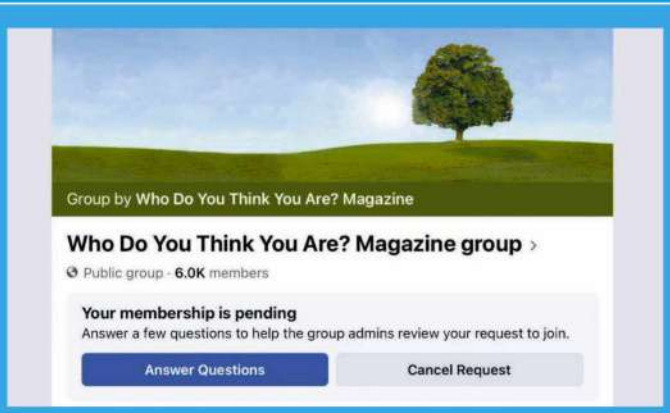
Search for the *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* Group (click the magnifying glass), then click 'Join' next to the name. You will need to read and agree to our rules.



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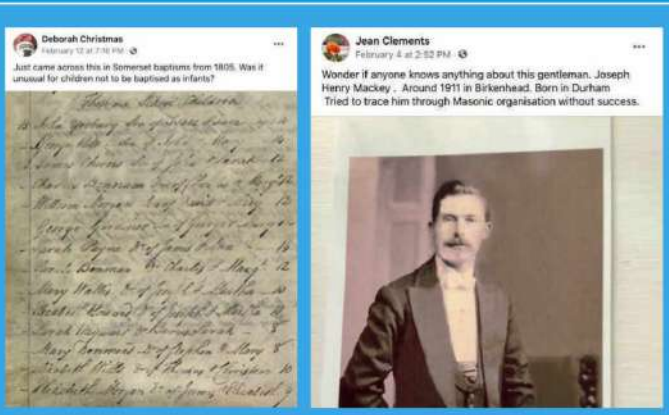
We are then notified, and will add you as a member as soon as possible. The group is growing rapidly, but you shouldn't have to wait too long before you're approved.



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You can either upload your own query or respond to other people's posts. It's a great way to share your love of family history and get help with your brick walls.

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Remembering The Dead

Rosemary Collins talks to a group sharing stories from a cemetery in Eastbourne

Georgiana Solomon's memorial inscription, and volunteers *(left to right)* Jo Barber, Ellen and Martin Read and Julia Kirwan

Sadly not all of our ancestors have a gravestone marking the place where they were buried; many were instead laid to rest in an unmarked grave. Ocklynge Cemetery in Eastbourne, East Sussex, is thought to house the remains of at least 20,000 people. Some have magnificent Victorian monuments, while others, particularly residents of the local workhouse, have no memorial. The cemetery opened in 1857, and closed to new burials in the 1980s. In 2021, the volunteer group Friends of Ocklynge Cemetery (FOOC; **fooc.org.uk**) was set up.

"Along with a couple of other local historians, I was a bit concerned about the state of the cemetery," explains the group's chair, Kevin Gordon. "The council had cut down on their maintenance a bit, and there were complaints on social media. So we thought we could get together some people to assist the council in maintaining the cemetery, but also find out some of the details of the people who were buried there. Initially I thought that we'd probably be working there maybe once a month, but actually we've got such great volunteers now that there are usually volunteers there two or three times a week."

People can find out more information about their families because of our work

The group has two goals – the physical maintenance of the cemetery, including cutting down undergrowth to reveal forgotten graves, and investigating the stories of those buried there and sharing them on its website. The group also uploads details of the cemetery's graves to Find A Grave (**findagrave.com/cemetery/2218586/ocklynge-cemetery**).

"I feel that Ocklynge Cemetery, and every cemetery really, is like an encyclopaedia of people from the local area," Kevin says. "There are people whose stories have been lost, and we're helping to find out those stories. They're people who were forgotten about, and when we do the research we find that they are fascinating characters who in their own way were quite influential."

Indeed, a surprising number of historically notable figures are buried in this unassuming graveyard. One splendid obelisk marks the last resting place of Saul Solomon (1817–1892) and his wife Georgiana (1844–1933). Saul was born on St Helena and lived in the Cape Colony in modern-day South Africa, where he became a newspaper publisher and one of the colony's first MPs. He was a liberal politician whose first election promise was "to give my decided opposition to all legislation tending to introduce distinctions either of class, colour or creed". Throughout his career Saul stood for increased political independence for the colony, and the rights of black residents.

Saul and Georgiana married in 1874. Seven years later the eldest of the couple's six children drowned in an accident. Saul retired from public life, and the family moved to Britain.

Georgiana was also a passionate supporter of freedom and political equality, particularly for women. Together with her daughter Daisy she became active in the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union, campaigning for women's right to vote. She was involved in the notorious 'Black Friday' demonstration in London in 1910, when a peaceful march to the Houses of Parliament was attacked by policemen. Two years later she was imprisoned for a month for breaking windows in Parliament.

FOOC also puts it skills to work helping relatives of those buried in the cemetery to locate their grave.

"People who are researching their family history, wherever they are in the world, can find out more information about their families because of the work that we've been doing," Kevin says.

TELL YOUR STORY

Share your local history project with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *rosemary.collins@ourmedia.co.uk*

Get Involved

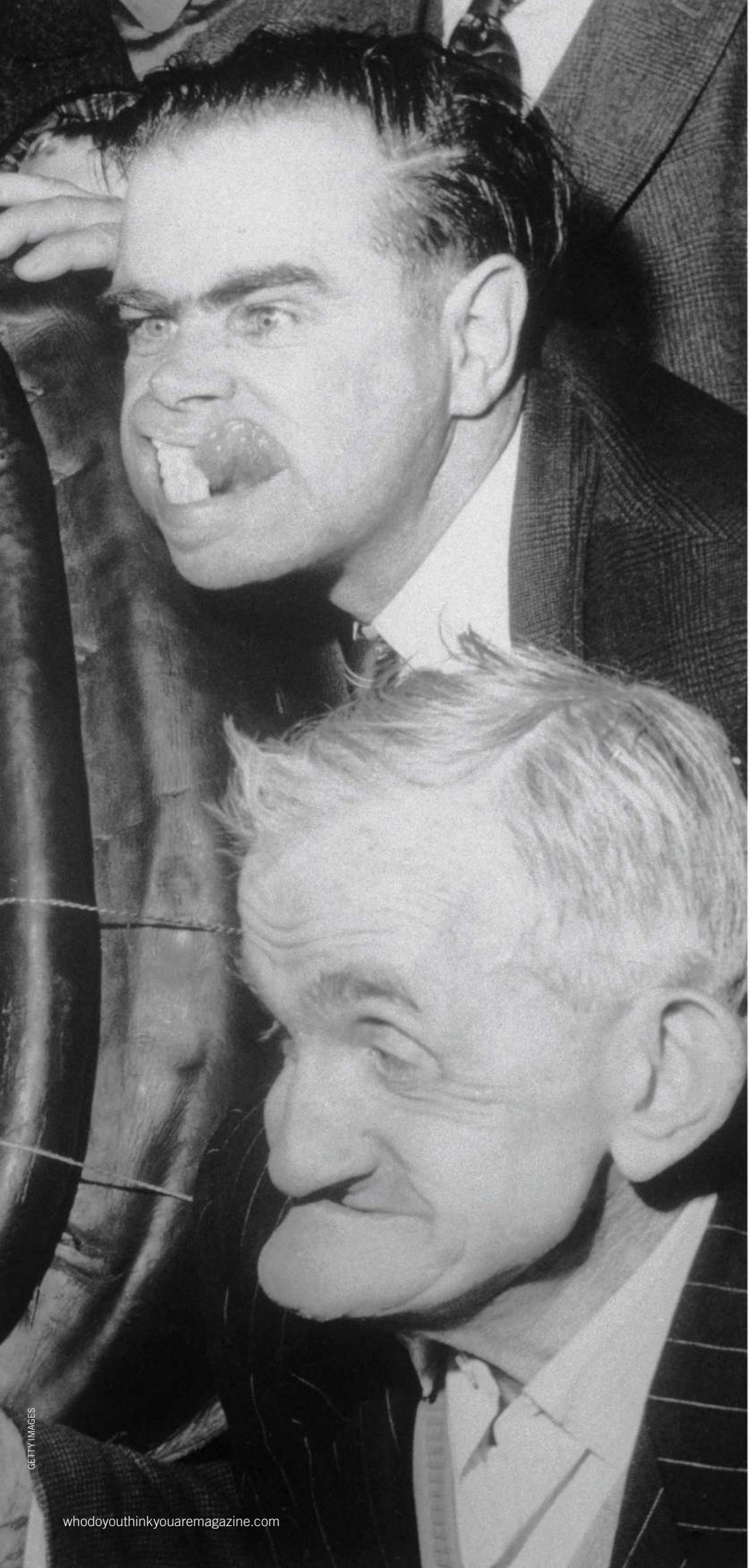
Friends Of Ocklynge Cemetery
w **fooc.org.uk**

You can find out more information about the group from its website. If you have a query about a relation who is buried in the cemetery, please email *friendsofocklyngecemetery@gmail.com*.

SHIRLEY MOTH

THE BIG PICTURE

Celebrating our ancestors caught on camera



GETTY IMAGES

Faces Of Fun

Four gurners show off their skills, 30 September 1965

When it comes to bizarre British traditions, gurning is so strange that it's difficult to believe it's anything more than an entirely fictional phenomenon invented solely to fool gullible tourists. But what the Lancashire newspaper the *Barrow News* snobbishly referred to on 30 July 1965 as "not exactly a great art form" certainly has pedigree: it's believed to have been practised in rural England ever since the medieval period. And the global centre of gurning is Egremont in Cumbria.

In September 1267 the first annual Egremont Crab Fair took place in the market town, allowing serfs to celebrate the completion of the harvest and the lord of the manor to give crab apples away to local children. Over the years the entertainments seen at the fair have encompassed everything from cockfighting and bull-baiting to pipe-smoking (the first contestant to smoke all of the tobacco they've been given wins), wrestling, horseracing, climbing a greasy pole… and gurning. Indeed, the fair still hosts the World Gurning Championships today.

The noticeably rage-filled definition of the word 'gurn' in Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898–1905) reads "to show or gnash the teeth in rage or scorn; to snarl as a dog; to look savage, distort the countenance; to speak in a snarling, surly tone", but how gurning became something of a spectator sport has been lost to the mists of time.

One theory suggests that it all started when an inebriated farmer threw a horse collar over his grimacing wife's head; even less happily, another potential origin involves the proverbial 'village idiot' being forced to wear a horse collar and pull faces for ale.

No matter. It's something of a comfort that, at a time when so many obsess over looking as attractive as possible for their Instagram followers, there's a courageous cohort going against the grain as they continue the centuries-old tradition of trying to look as revolting as possible.

And if you'd like to chance your arm, or indeed face, then you've got plenty of time to put the training in. This year's fair will take place on 19–20 September: **egremontcrabfair.com**.

Transform your research into fascinating stories

Nick Peers reveals how to use the free software Quoll Writer to bring your ancestors back to life

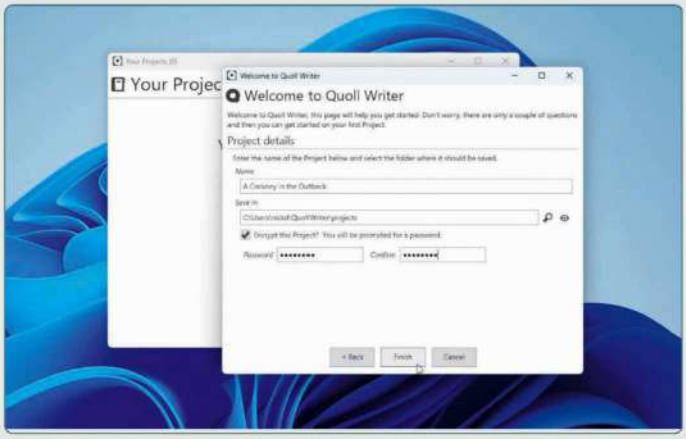
When it comes to sharing our research into our tree, it can be hard to interest our relations in their own family history. The obvious solution is to present our forebears' stories as fully formed, lively biographies, but how do you go about translating your discoveries into a compelling narrative? The answer lies in a storytelling tool like Quoll Writer, which is completely free to use. Although it's geared towards writing fiction, you can easily adapt it for factual accounts. In this article we'll show you how to do just that.

Start by downloading Quoll Writer for Windows, Mac or Linux from **quollwriter.com** – in the case of Windows, simply double-click the installer and follow the prompts. If a 'Windows protected your PC' message appears, click 'More info' followed by 'Run anyway' because the program is perfectly safe to use. Once installed, leave 'Run Quoll Writer' ticked and click 'Finish'. Then go through the setup wizard – it's all self-explanatory and once finished, you'll be ready to begin using the program with the help of our step-by-step guide.

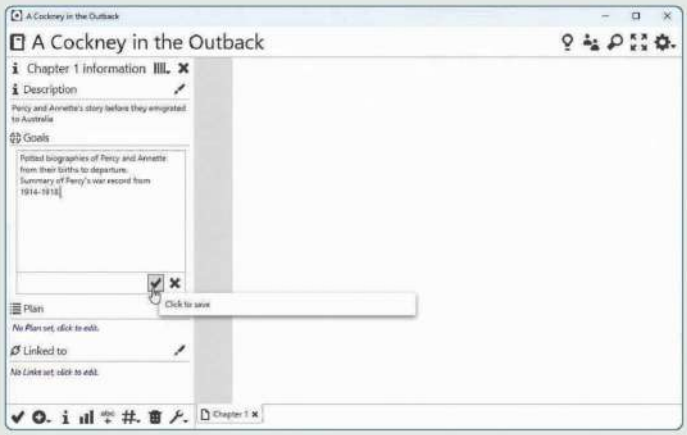
Once you've completed your story, what then? Open the main menu and choose 'Export Project' to export a Word document for printing; you can also save it as an EPUB document for reading on your Kindle, Kobo or mobile device.

TOP TIP!

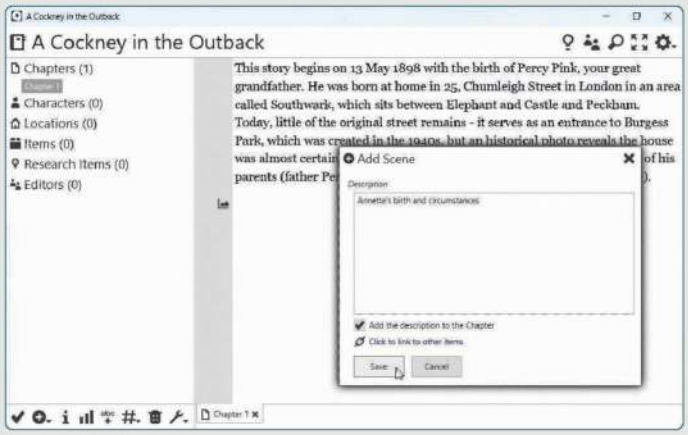
We've barely scratched the surface of Quoll Writer – choose 'Help' > 'View the User Guide' from the main menu to get a comprehensive overview.



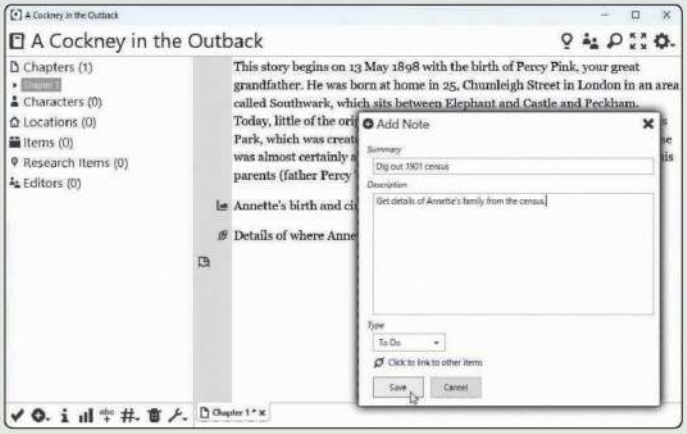
1 Create Your Story The first time you launch Quoll Writer, you'll be prompted to create a project from scratch or import an existing story in Word (.docx) format. Choose 'Create a Project', give your story a suitably descriptive name, choose where to save it, add optional encryption for security if required, and click 'Finish'.



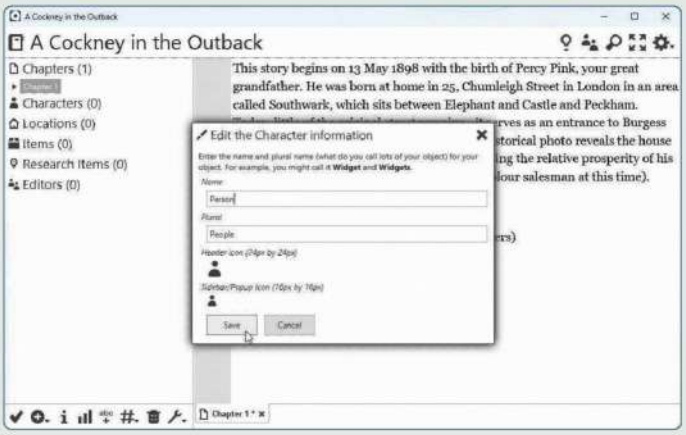
2 Set Your Goals You'll find yourself at Quoll Writer's main two-pane window in Chapter 1, ready to start with your story. Before doing so, click the 'i' button in the shortcut toolbar (bottom left) to fill in details about your first chapter, including adding a description and any aims (goals) you want to set for this chapter.



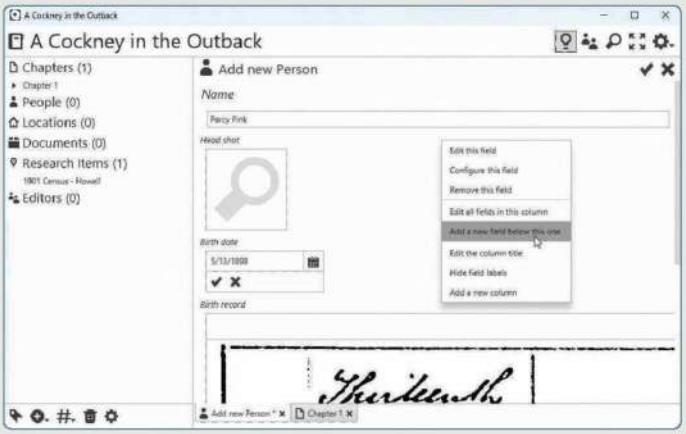
3 Structure Your Story You can see how stories are broken down into chapters, but there's another level within chapters called scenes. Scenes can be dragged and dropped to change their running order. Right-click inside the text-editing window and choose 'New' > 'Scene'. Give it a name and click 'Save'.



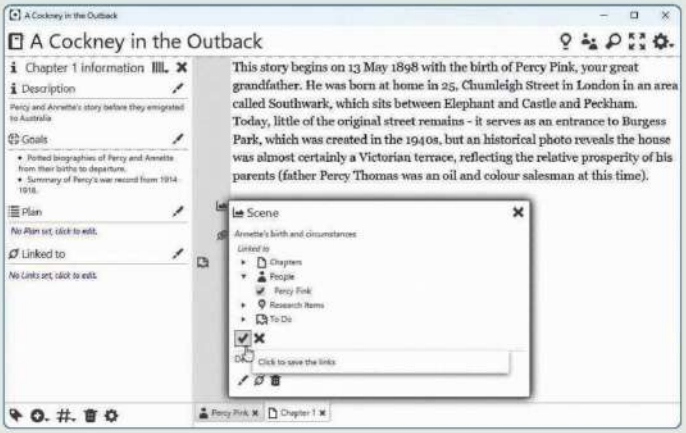
4 Fill In Placeholders No time to write the full story now? Right-click and choose 'New' > 'Plot Outline Item' to fill in a rough outline of what you want to tell at this point in the story. You can also insert notes ('New' > 'Note') that can be simple descriptions or 'To Do's. You'll see icons to the left of the text that help identify these.



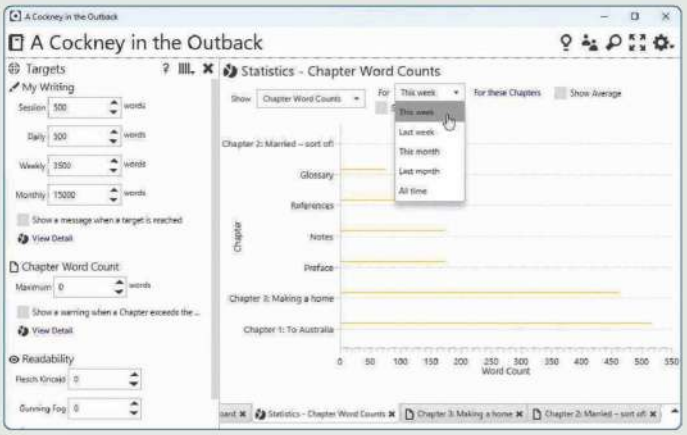
5 Set Up Assets Quoll Writer can also be a repository for all your research via customisable 'Assets'. Four are set up by default: Characters, Locations, Items and Research Items. Right-click one to make changes (eg renaming Characters to People). To add an ancestor's details, right-click 'People'. Choose 'Add a new Person'.



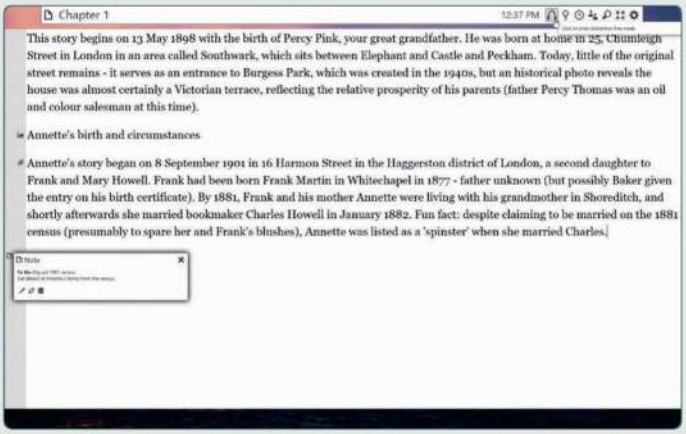
6 Add Assets Click 'Show all fields' to view a list of information (fields) you can record. Again, these can be edited to meet your needs – right-click an existing one to edit or delete it, or right-click beneath the 'Name' field and choose 'Add a new field' to add new information – field types include text, images, links to files and more.



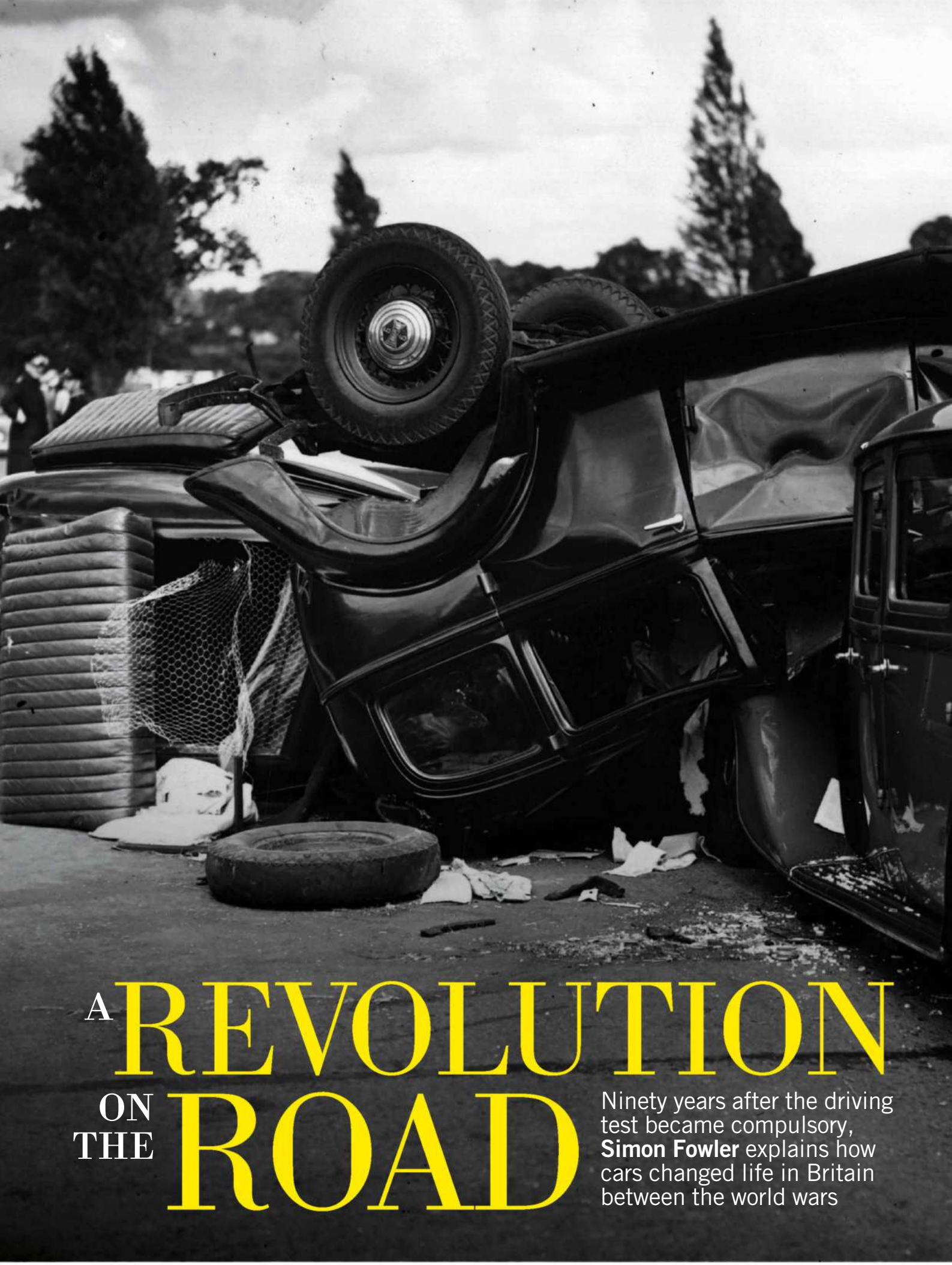
7 Create Links Create a 'Links' field to connect assets to each other (eg, you can link one document to multiple people). You can also link assets to chapters via the 'Chapter Information' sidebar or scenes by clicking the scene icon and clicking the links shortcut. Links make it easy to jump between parts of your research.



8 Get Writing Quoll Writer offers numerous tools to aid your writing, from the built-in spellchecker and 'Find Problems' tool to a selection of warm-up exercises and an 'Ideas Board' for recording general notes on. There's also a handy 'Statistics' tool, alongside a tool for setting yourself various word targets.



9 Eliminate Distractions When you want to simply focus on your words, press the F11 key to switch to full-screen mode. You can still easily access all parts of the program from here – roll your mouse to the top of the screen to reveal a slide-out menu. For completely distraction-free writing, click the headphones button.



A REVOLUTION ON THE ROAD

Ninety years after the driving test became compulsory, **Simon Fowler** explains how cars changed life in Britain between the world wars

This photo of crashed cars on the Kingston Bypass was taken on 15 July 1939

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Visiting Coventry in 1934, a centre of the motor industry, writer JB Priestley mused that, "The modern motor car represents an astonishing feat of human ingenuity. If we were one half so clever in the matters that lie far outside machinery as we are about machinery itself, what people we should be."

Motor vehicles were of course nothing new. Indeed they had played a significant role in supporting the British Army during the First World War, becoming much more efficient in the process. Over the four years, engines, braking and lights had all been greatly improved. But they were not cheap, and by today's standards performance was sluggish at best. In 1919 the Wolseley Fifteen "four-seat touring body" model cost £800 (approximately £48,000 in today's money), with a supplement of £200 for one with "enclosed saloon body". In comparison the supercar of the day – the Hispano-Suiza H6, which was launched at the 1919 Paris Motor Show and could reach 85 mph – cost £2,300.

Until the 1920s it was relatively unusual for a car's owner to drive himself (very few women owned cars). A chauffeur/mechanic was employed in most well-to-do households. An exception was Sir Stanley Reed, the editor of *The Times of India*, who provided a testimony that the manufacturer Vauxhall used in its advertising: "I do not keep a driver, and look after the engine entirely myself, but I have never found that the car offers any difficulty to the intelligent owner-driver."

No Longer A Luxury

Over time reliability improved, and the price came down. In 1919 there were about 360,000 cars on the road. By 1939, the number had risen to two million. In 1938, the magazine *Autocar* declared that, "No longer is a car a luxury. It is the reliable servant for all manner of people, and as time goes on, will become available to every class of owner."

The cost of buying a car roughly halved with mass-production techniques. And as real incomes increased by nearly a third, they were increasingly affordable. In addition, cars became cheaper to run, partly because they were more reliable, but mainly because petrol cost less. It is little surprise that one in five families owned a car in 1939.

Even so, they were still comparatively expensive. In 1932 the mid-range Humber Snipe cost £435. By comparison the average price of a London house was £500. The most popular cars were naturally the smaller, cheaper models. The first British-made one was the Austin Seven or 'Austin Baby', which went on sale in 1922 – and by 1939, almost 300,000 had been sold. By the mid-1930s the most popular car, the Morris Eight, cost between £95 and £140 depending on the extras. Of course, there were many second-hand cars available, which were especially attractive to the mechanically minded who enjoyed tinkering with them.

The specifications offered by the manufacturers in their vehicles were initially pretty basic. However, when companies began to compete for middle-class families rather than just enthusiasts, this began to change.

It was not, for example, until the mid-1920s that electric starters became common. Before then motorists had to use a starting handle that could be tricky, particularly on cold mornings. Initially most cars did not have windscreen wipers either. Radios were standard in the Hillman Melody Minx in 1934, but few other cars adopted them.

It was also rare to find indicators or brake lights. Drivers were expected to stick their arms out of the window and make signals with their right hand: rotating clockwise to signal that they were turning left, or slowly waving up and down to show that the car was stopping.

Until well into the 1930s cars seem to have been rarely used for work or to do the shopping. They were kept for the weekends and holidays. Many families used their new freedom to go where they liked when they liked, to explore the countryside. Author Rudyard Kipling wrote, "The chief aim of my car so far as I am concerned, is the discovery of England… the car is a time-machine on which one can slip from one century to another."

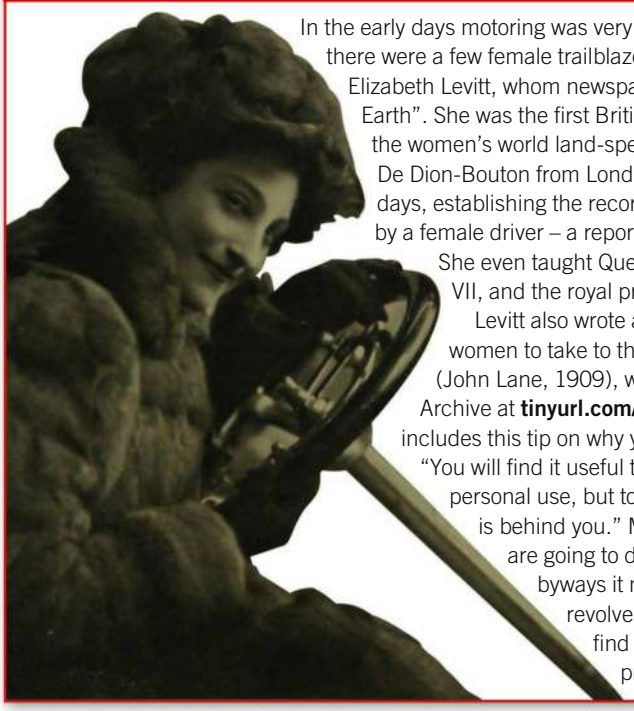
A salesman demonstrates a Citroën Traction 11 Cabriolet at Olympia, London, 12 October 1933

Beauty And Convenience

The countryside was just an hour's journey away. An advertisement in the *Daily Mail* suggested, "Each weekend a new scene – a new delight. This is what this 'Standard' Light Car means to the family." Another promised that the Austin Seven made it possible to "revel in the beauties of the country while enjoying the conveniences of the town".

Dorothy Elizabeth Levitt 1882–1922

This pioneer had some surprising advice for other female motorists



In the early days motoring was very much dominated by men, but there were a few female trailblazers. One of them was Dorothy Elizabeth Levitt, whom newspapers called "the Fastest Girl on Earth". She was the first British woman racing driver, and held the women's world land-speed record. In 1905, she drove a De Dion-Bouton from London to Liverpool and back over two days, establishing the record for the longest drive achieved by a female driver – a reported total distance of 410½ miles. She even taught Queen Alexandra, the wife of Edward VII, and the royal princesses to drive.

Levitt also wrote a "little handbook" encouraging women to take to the road: *The Woman and the Car* (John Lane, 1909), which is available from the Internet Archive at **tinyurl.com/arch-levitt**. Its fascinating advice includes this tip on why you should take a mirror with you: "You will find it useful to have it handy – not for strictly personal use, but to occasionally hold up to see what is behind you." More alarmingly, she adds, "If you are going to drive alone in the highways and byways it might be advisable to carry a small revolver. I have an automatic 'Colt', and find it very easy to handle as there is practically no recoil."

GETTY IMAGES / INTERNET ARCHIVE

A car made by US firm Noma crosses a bridge in Windsor, Berkshire, c1920

Travel writers such as HV Morton described these beauties of the countryside. His books and those of his rivals sold in their tens of thousands, encouraging readers to explore rural Britain for themselves.

Even in the 1920s and 1930s, the reality was quite different. Beauty spots were soon overrun by badly parked cars and picnicking families, much to the annoyance of the locals. Roadhouses appeared on the highways to cater for the new motorists. They were widely mocked for their 'Brewers' Tudor' inauthentic architecture, distinguished by its black-painted beams. But they provided facilities from bowling greens to restaurants – and in one case even a polo ground.

The experience of driving was vastly different from today. In part, of course, there were far fewer cars on the road. But until a compulsory driving test was introduced on 1 June 1935, anybody could buy a car without having to demonstrate any competence. You learned on the job. Lieutenant Colonel CH Omanney wrote to the magazine *The Listener* in 1932 complaining that he had found that "out of every ten cars one meets, seven are definitely on the wrong side of the road, and nothing will make them budge".

There were huge numbers of accidents that were largely caused by bad driving

The police were also reluctant to deal harshly with the usually middle-class motorists when they drove dangerously. In 1928 the Home Office warned local police forces to treat motorists with respect because they were usually "persons of the utmost respectability by accident brought, so to speak, into collisions with the law… common sense requires that they should not be treated as possible criminals".

Motorists had to deal with horse-drawn carts, trams and above all pedestrians. Omanney complained that passers-by "hurl themselves among moving traffic in a manner that makes one gasp. It is not surprising that so many people get killed in our towns. So long as pedestrians insist in showing off the nimbleness by dodging about amongst cars, they deserve all they get."

A jam in a country road in the 1920s

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A Heavy Toll

As a result, there were huge numbers of accidents that were largely caused by bad driving. In 1934 there were some 7,300 deaths and nearly 225,000 other injuries on the roads. In 2023, with vastly more cars on the road, there were approximately 1,600 deaths and 160,000 other injuries. To take one case, Leslie Hore-Belisha, the minister of transport, was nearly knocked down in July 1934 by a small sports car, as he demonstrated that a pedestrian could claim

The Automobile Association (AA) opened Britain's first petrol station in Aldermaston, Berkshire, in November 1919

right of way by using a signed crossing. He is remembered for the Belisha beacon – bright orange freestanding lights that indicate a pedestrian crossing.

In the same year the speed limit, which had been abolished in 1930, was reintroduced at a more sensible 30 mph in urban areas. The original limit, 20 mph, had been almost universally flouted.

Trunk Roads Arrive

The Ministry of Transport was established in 1919, and took over responsibilities for major roads from local county councils. A few new roads were constructed during the period, often as a way of employing the unemployed.

The East Lancashire Road (now the A580) between Manchester and Liverpool was Britain's first purpose-built trunk road, and opened by George V in July 1934. The best-known was the Kingston Bypass (the A3) in South-West London, which became famous for speeding as motorists raced each other along it.

The last peer to be tried before his fellow lords was Lieutenant Colonel Edward Southwell Russell, 26th Baron de Clifford, who was involved in a fatal accident with another driver while driving along the bypass in 1935. After a short trial he was acquitted of driving without due care and attention, of dangerous driving and of causing death by reckless driving.

It could also be hard to obtain petrol in rural areas. Fuel was sold in cans by garages, many of which doubled as the village blacksmith. The first petrol pump was opened at Aldermaston in 1919 on the Berkshire stretch of the Bath Road, one of Britain's busiest. Farningham in Kent boasted a service station that was in the style of a timber-framed Tudor gatehouse, but with the latest garage equipment including a ramp for inspecting cars.

The introduction of petrol rationing and other restrictions on the outbreak of war in 1939 meant the end of leisure driving for the duration. Cars were put away ready for peacetime. They emerged into a postwar world where the car became the mode of transport for almost everybody, regardless of social class. This led to a transformation of British society and the landscape that had been foreseen in the 20 years between the world wars.

SIMON FOWLER is an expert in family history. His book *How to Research Your Second World War Ancestors* was published by The History Press on 12 June

Resources

Take your research further

BOOK

The Motoring Age: The Automobile and Britain 1896–1939
Peter Thorold
Profile, 2003
This guide to the social history of motoring can be freely borrowed from the Internet Archive at **tinyurl.com/arch-thorold**.

MUSEUMS

BRITISH MOTOR MUSEUM
a **Banbury Road, Gaydon CV35 0BJ**
t 01926 895300
w **britishmotormuseum.co.uk**
The museum claims to own the world's largest collection of historic British cars. There's also the Brooklands Museum in Weybridge, Surrey (**brooklandsmuseum.com**), Coventry Transport Museum (**transport-museum.com**) and the National Motor Museum in Beaulieu, Hampshire (**nationalmotormuseum.org.uk**).

WEBSITES

BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE
w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**
This is a great source of news stories about early motorists and accidents, and advertisements.

FINDMYPAST
w **bit.ly/fmp-cov-veh**
The collection 'Warwickshire, Coventry, Vehicle Registrations 1921–1944' contains more than 143,000 records. Local archives also hold registration records.

GRACE'S GUIDE
w **gracesguide.co.uk**
This excellent website devoted to all aspects of industrial history includes many pages on cars and the firms that made them.

WIKIPEDIA
w **tinyurl.com/wiki-veh-reg**
This list of number plate codes should help you identify the county of registration of the cars depicted in old family photos.

GETTY IMAGES

MERCHANDISE

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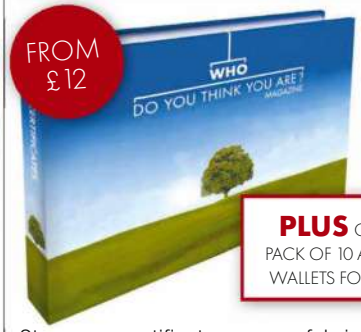

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'The Mention Of A Castle Provided A Crucial Clue'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

When Lynne Dixon was researching the life of pioneering architect Annabel Dott, she hit a brick wall with her paternal line until a newspaper article provided a breakthrough. As told to **Gail Dixon**

The creation of a quadrangle of Jacobean-style houses ignited enthusiasm in the British press in 1924. This hamlet of nine thatched homes was dubbed "the all-electric village" and stood in Grey Wood near East Hoathly in Sussex. Electricity was a life-changing luxury that few could afford at the time, and wouldn't become standard in British homes until the 1930s and 1940s.

The model village was the brainchild of Annabel Dott (née Hall), who designed 29 buildings in the UK that still stand today. In the early 20th century, when Annabel's career flourished, female architects were extremely thin on the ground.

LYNNE DIXON is retired from her career in education and lives in London

I discovered Annabel while participating in a Shared Learning Project for the University of the Third Age (**u3a.org.uk**), a movement for retired people. I was told that she was a self-taught architect who once built a house without any stairs. That was a tantalising incentive.

Annabel was so fascinating that I decided to write a book about her with co-researcher Dorothy Reed, and this led to tracing her family history. She was born in Stepney, East London, in 1868, and her parents Robert and Annabella Hall (née Copland) were from Tyneside in the north-east of England.

Robert was a customs officer and the family moved to a grand house in West Hackney, London. Sadly, he died of oesophageal cancer when Annabel was only two years old.

In the 1890s, Annabel and her mother moved to Bournemouth, where they lived in a large residence called Hylton House.

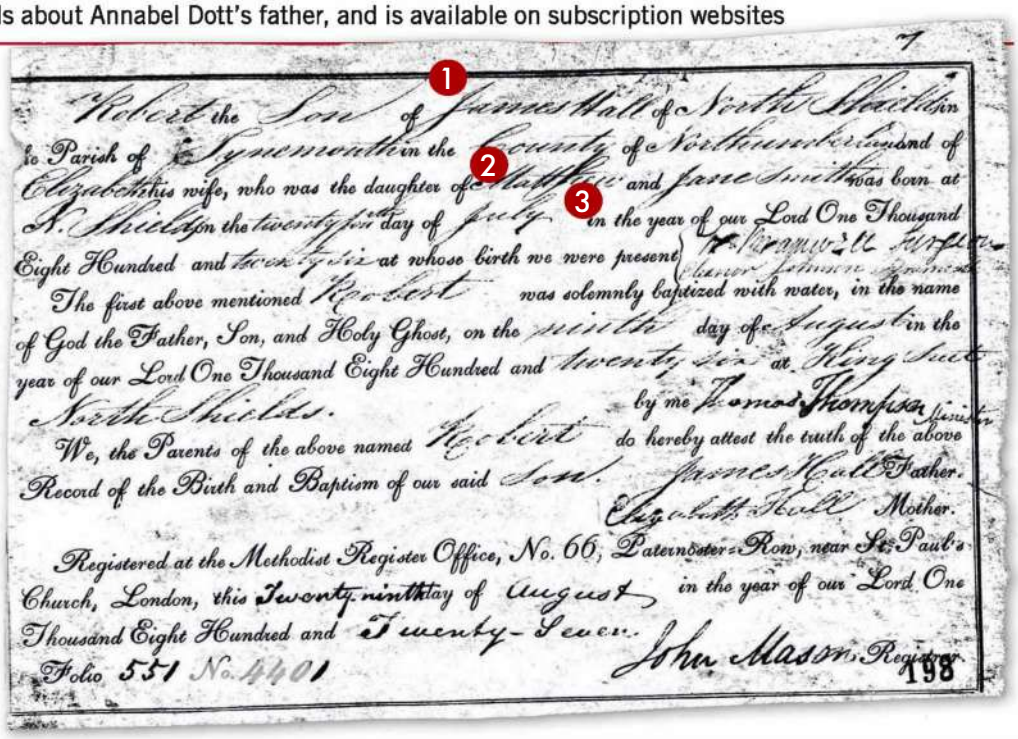
Wesleyan Baptism Record, 1826

This record provided key details about Annabel Dott's father, and is available on subscription websites

1 James Hall
The record, which Lynne found on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), names Robert's father, together with his mother – James' wife Elizabeth.

2 Matthew And Jane Smith
The listing also mentions the names of Elizabeth's parents, which is unusual for baptism records. Lynne could deduce Elizabeth's maiden name, and trace the family further back.

3 Birthdate
The record includes Robert's birthdate of 24 July 1826 (plus the names of two witnesses), as well as the date of baptism: 9 August 1826.



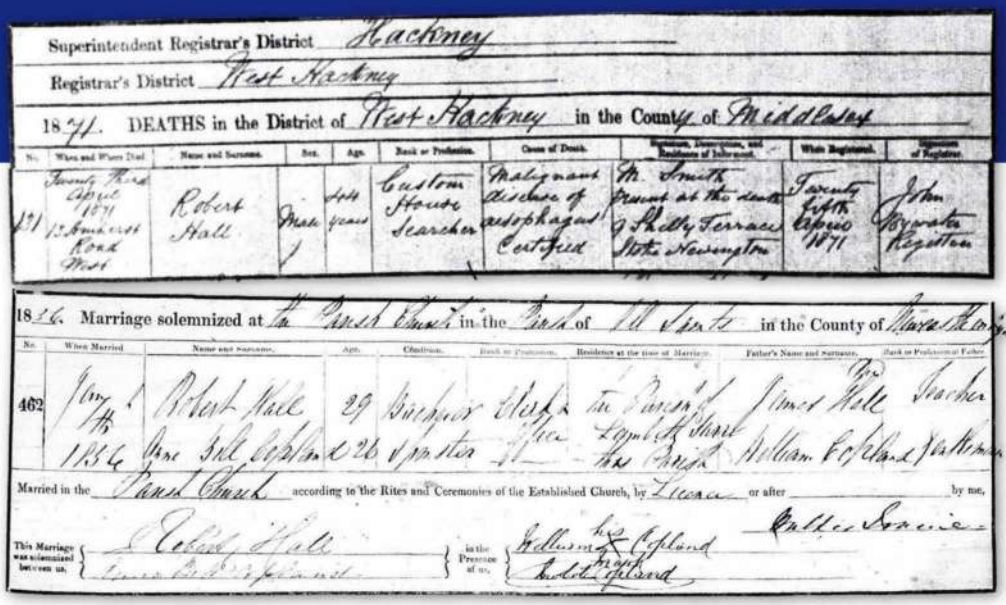
Robert the Son of James Hall of North Shields in the Parish of Tynemouth in the County of Northumberland and of Elizabeth his wife, who was the daughter of Matthew and Jane Smith was born at N. Shields in the twenty fifth day of July in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and twenty six at whose birth we were present

The first above mentioned Robert was solemnly baptized with water, in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, on the ninth day of August in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and twenty six at King Street North Shields. by me Thomas Thompson

We, the Parents of the above named Robert do hereby attest the truth of the above Record of the Birth and Baptism of our said Son. James Hall Father. Elizabeth Hall Mother.

Registered at the Methodist Register Office, No. 66, Paternoster-Row, near St. Paul's Church, London, this Twenty-ninth day of August in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty-Seven. John Mason, Register

Folio 551 No. 4401 198


Superintendent Registrar's District Hackney
Registrar's District West Hackney
1871. DEATHS in the District of West Hackney in the County of Middlesex

No.	When and Where Died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Rank or Profession	Cause of Death	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant	When Registered	Signature of Registrar
171	Twenty Third April 1871 12 Amherst Road West	Robert Hall	Male	44 years	Custom House Searcher	Malignant disease of oesophagus Certified	M. Smith present at the death 9 Shelly Terrace Stoke Newington	Twenty Fifth April 1871	John Bryant Registrar

1856. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of All Saints in the County of Northumberland

No.	When Married	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the time of Marriage	Father's Name and Surname	Rank or Profession of Father
462	Jany 4th 1856	Robert Hall	29	Bachelor	Clerk in Office	The Parish of Lambeth Surrey	James Hall	Searcher
		Anne Bell Coplan	26	Spinster		The Parish	William Coplan	Yeoman

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by Licence or after by me, Peter Sowerby

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Robert Hall, Anne Bell Coplan. In the Presence of us, William his mark Coplan, Robert Coplan

The records of Robert Hall's marriage in 1856 and *(top)* his death in 1871 aged 44

My Brick Wall

The Coplands were easy to trace back to Northumberland, but Robert's side proved testing because Hall is a common name in north-east England.

Robert and Annabella married in 1856 in Newcastle upon Tyne and their marriage record provided Robert's father's name, which was James Hall.

The Halls were Wesleyan Methodists and Robert was baptised in North Shields, Tyneside, in 1826, although this wasn't registered until the following year. Fortunately, this record provided his mother's name Elizabeth Smith, and her parents' names too: Matthew and Jane Smith. A Matthew Smith married Jane Temple in South Shields in 1777, and I was sure that they were the right couple.

I knew that Annabel in later life had lived for 10 years in Barnes, in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. In 2023, a friend pointed out that back issues of the newspaper the *Richmond Herald* were available digitally online, so I searched for Annabel and discovered a wonderful obituary from 1937. A simple statement provided groundbreaking detail. It said, "A paternal grandmother had lived as a child at Hylton Castle, near Sunderland." Eureka! This tied in with the name of Annabel's home in Bournemouth.

I emailed Dorothy straight away, and danced around the kitchen. I now knew something about Annabel's paternal grandmother Elizabeth Smith and great grandmother Jane Temple. I was determined to prove the connection.

HAVE YOU BROKEN THROUGH A BRICK WALL?

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

Hylton Castle in Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, where Annabel's relations once lived

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

My Breakthrough

Researching magnificent Hylton Castle, I established that a family named Temple had lived there in the early 19th century when Elizabeth was a child. Newspaper searches revealed that Ann Smith, niece of Simon Temple, got married in Monkwearmouth, near Sunderland, in 1807.

I then confirmed that Ann Smith was an older sister of Elizabeth Smith. The owner of Hylton Castle, Simon Temple, was Elizabeth's uncle and the twin brother of her mother Jane.

Simon Temple was a local entrepreneur whose father had been born in Crayke, a village in **North Yorkshire. Annabel used to tell people that as a child she had often stayed at Crayke Castle, which was further proof.**

Annabel developed an interest in architecture after being influenced by Henrietta Barnett, **who co-founded the progressive** Toynbee Hall settlement in London's East End. She educated herself in design, building and how to manage projects from start to finish.

After her mother died in 1903, Annabel moved to Woodstock in Cape Town, South Africa, where she married Rev. Patrick Dott and began renovating buildings. One of her projects was the historic Treaty House in Woodstock, where an agreement between Dutch and British forces was signed in 1806.

In 1909, the couple returned to Britain where Patrick became the vicar of Dringhouses in the city of York. Annabel fell in love with the idyllic village of Goathland, North Yorkshire, where the ITV drama *Heartbeat* (1992–2010) was filmed. After suffering a stillbirth in 1910, she recuperated in Goathland and built a residence called The Stone House, which still stands today.

During the First World War Patrick became an army chaplain and the couple decided to donate holiday cottages they had built in Goathland for the use of disabled officers, housing several families before they were sold in 1932.

Annabel saw projects through from start to finish, and was single-minded in her focus. She may not have been liked by everyone she worked with, but she was undoubtedly admired for her achievements.

Reader Tips

What advice does Lynne have for other researchers?

- Make use of every scrap of information that you find.
- Local records websites such as Durham Records Online (**durhamrecordsonline.com**) may provide extra information in their transcriptions.
- Search databases that you've used before, in case more details have been added.

That Tiresome Lady Architect: The Life and Work of Annabel Dott (Brown Dog Books, 2024) costs £14.99

Around Britain

Berkshire

Jonathan Scott revisits England's only royal county and meets family historians marking a milestone

One of the entrances to the royal residence Windsor Castle

On 10 August 1948 Felix Hull became Berkshire's first county archivist. He was working out of the basement of Reading's old Shire Hall, now the Roseate Hotel, and collections under his care eventually extended into adjacent vaults that now house the Crown Court. Seventy-five years on, the former Berkshire Record Office celebrated its birthday by becoming the Royal Berkshire Archives (**royalberkshirearchives.org.uk**). This was in order to reflect Berkshire's unique status as a royal county thanks to its long-standing connection to the British monarchy, particularly as the home of the royal residence Windsor Castle.

The archives has around eight miles of shelving. Among the oldest documents here is a grant of land in Aldermaston written in the mid-12th century. Considering the county's rural history, it will come as no surprise that there's an impressive number of estate and farming records here, while significant local business collections include breweries, Reading joiners Samuel Elliott and Newbury-based engineering firm Plenty and Son. Other important holdings include the archives of Broadmoor Hospital, Reading Prison and the Royal Berkshire Yeomanry, plus a collection from the Thames Conservancy.

The archive's website has had an overhaul since our last visit in 2021

Founded in 1857, the Thames Conservancy was responsible for the management of the river, eventually taking on the length of the waterway from Cricklade in Wiltshire to the sea at Yantlet Creek on the Isle of Grain. The Thames Conservancy collection forms an "unbroken record of the non-tidal river's management over 200 years", and includes details of lock-keepers, engineers and other staff. You can find out more via **thames250exhibition.com**.

Featured Parishes

Royal Berkshire Archives has registers from about 200 ancient parishes, plus nearly 100 more that joined the county during reorganisations in the 19th and 20th centuries. Note that the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham (**wshc.org.uk**), which looks after the Salisbury Diocesan archive, has some early Bishops' Transcripts for Berkshire, plus lots of Berkshire wills, while the Oxfordshire History Centre in Cowley (**oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/museums-and-history/oxfordshire-history-centre**) has registers for Berkshire parishes that now form part of Oxford.

In terms of remote research,

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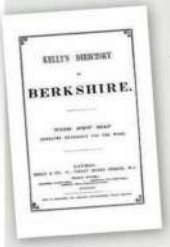
Free Online Records

Indexes of wills and soldiers' records, pedigrees, enclosure maps and directories

Directories

w **tinyurl.com/sco-berks**



On the University of Leicester's website Special Collections Online you can browse a dozen trade directories from the county back to 1833.

Wills Index

w **tinyurl.com/rba-wills**

The county archive's index to Archdeaconry of Berkshire wills, administrations and inventories (1480–1857) reveals the full name, occupation and archival reference.

Enclosure Maps

w **berkshireenclosure.org.uk**

The enclosure maps and awards on this site provide the names of the landowners and occupiers in each parish between 1738 and 1883.

Pedigrees

w **tinyurl.com/fs-berks-ped**

FamilySearch's digital library includes this 1837 volume of pedigrees from Berkshire compiled by the registering clerk of the College of Arms.

Soldiers Index

w **tinyurl.com/ward-soldiers**

Here you can search for references to soldiers of both Berkshire and Wiltshire regiments found in militia records held by the Rifles' museum in Salisbury.

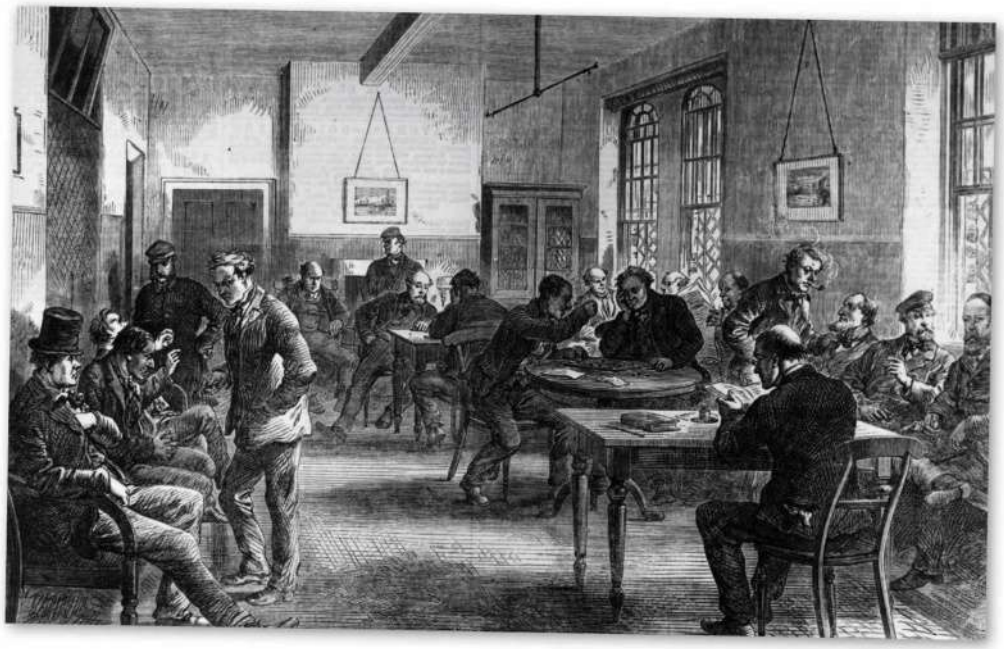
Berkshire Family History Society has been transcribing and indexing parish registers for many years, and the data is available as CDs or PDF downloads from the online shop on its website **berksfhs.org**, or via Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**). Ancestry has had a large collection of Berkshire electoral registers from 1840–1965 for some time (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61258/**), but is now in the process of readying parish material for launch. Senior archivist Ivone Turnbull reveals that virtually every parish gave permission for digitisation, so over 90 per cent of the Berkshire parish registers will be available on Ancestry when the collection goes live, hopefully by the end of 2025.

The archive's own website has developed significantly since our last visit in 2021, including the addition of a lot more advice and an improved catalogue launched in January (**ww2.berkshirenclosure.org.uk/calmview/default.aspx**).

"We have added highlights of some of our more popular collections which will take users directly to the collection information for those records," Ivone says. "These include enclosure records, the archive of Yellow Pages, records of Broadmoor Hospital and tithe records. The online catalogue provides collection information to enable users to see what we have, and determine whether they wish to visit us to view the items in person or ask us to undertake research for them."

Staff have also increased the amount of material available ▶

Male patients in Broadmoor, depicted in the *Illustrated London News* in 1867



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from the online Digital Repository at **berksrecords.access.preservica.com**, adding 2,295 files totalling 105.8 GB since November last year. "This includes parish magazines, electoral registers and records of the Pinkneys Green Scout Group." However, some of this material can only be viewed on computers at the archive for privacy or legal reasons.

Fifty Not Out

This year also marks the 50th birthday of the Berkshire Family History Society, which has been busy planning a number of special events and a celebratory conference scheduled for 7 June. Jackie Blow, who placed an advertisement in a Reading newspaper in 1975 asking if anyone else interested in family history would like to form a club, was expected to attend. Chairman Catherine Sampson says, "Fifty years on, and she is still an active volunteer with us!"

For several years the society's main base has been on the second floor of Reading Central Library. However, the council won £19.1 million from the Government's Levelling Up Fund to create a new arts centre and library, which is due to open at Bridge Street in spring 2026. Since the new library will be smaller than the current building, the society is planning to move to another venue within the next 12 months.

"We will continue to work closely with Reading Central Library however, as we do with other libraries across Berkshire," Catherine adds.

The society's website is a great starting point if you're new to the area. Via **berksfhs.org/info/** non-members can use the Berkshire Names Index to search databases of baptisms, banns, marriages and burials, and access the very useful Berkipedia: a complete guide to places, Poor Law unions, churches, cemeteries and burial grounds.

When you're ready to go deeper, there are potentially useful collections in local-history libraries at Reading and Maidenhead, as well as within museums in Reading, Windsor and Newbury. Maidenhead Library (**rbwm.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries/library-maidenhead-library**), for example, has cuttings and ephemera relating to car manufacturers, film companies and brewing – especially Nicholson's Brewery, which dominated the centre of Maidenhead until the 1950s.

Another useful repository for anyone researching agricultural labourers is Reading University's Museum of English Rural Life (**merl.reading.ac.uk**). Holdings here include a large collection of local-history photographs and records from hundreds of individual farms across the UK, as well as firms such as Suttons Seeds, which was founded in Reading in 1906. Indeed the town became known for "biscuits, bulbs and beer", and the archive of local biscuit manufacturer Huntley & Palmers is split between Reading Museum (**readingmuseum.org.uk**) and the university's Special Collections (**collections.reading.ac.uk/special-collections/**).

Female workers at Huntley & Palmers' factory in Reading, 2 May 1937

TOP TIP!

Volunteers from Oxfordshire Family History Society have transcribed registers from North Berkshire parishes, which can be purchased from its website as downloads or on CD: **ofhs.uk**.

LOCAL INDUSTRY

Vincents Of Reading

Did your relation work for this major employer?

A Vincents of Reading horsebox on a Daimler chassis, 1947

William Vincent's company began trading in Reading in 1805, and for 175 years or so manufactured such diverse items as agricultural equipment, stagecoaches, railway carriages, car bodies and horseboxes beloved by such notable customers as the royal family. Royal Berkshire Archives has a sizeable collection about the firm including business records, adverts, photos and brochures. You can explore these holdings under reference D/EX1401 via its catalogue at **tinyurl.com/berks-cat-vincents**, and read about coverage in local newspapers at **tinyurl.com/rba-motoring-news**.

GETTY IMAGES

BERKSHIRE DIRECTORY

ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES

Royal Berkshire Archives
a **9 Coley Avenue, Reading RG1 6AF**
t 0118 937 5132
w **royalberkshirearchives.org.uk**
Here you'll find baptism, marriage and burial registers back to the 16th century, in addition to parish-chest material, records of schools and hospitals, poll books, rates and valuations, and electoral registers that are available via Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**). The probate collection includes material from two church courts: the Archdeacon of Berkshire and the Peculiar of Faringdon. And at **royalberkshirearchives.org.uk/nonparochial-register** you will find a tool that allows you to locate all non-Church of England registers of births/baptisms, marriages and deaths/burials, as well as registers from workhouses and municipal cemeteries.

Ascot Durning Library
a **High Street, Ascot SL5 7JF**
t 01628 683882
e *local.studies@rbwm.gov.uk*
w **bit.ly/ascot-family**
The local-studies room here contains resources for Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale.

Maidenhead Library
a **St Ives Road, Maidenhead SL6 1QU**
t 01628 796969
e *maidenhead.library@rbwm.gov.uk*
w **tinyurl.com/maiden-lib**
The Nicholson Room on the first floor holds photos, books and maps relating to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. There is also a collection of local newspaper the *Maidenhead Advertiser* back to 1870 (on microfilm), and transcriptions of parish registers for most of Berkshire.

Oxfordshire History Centre
a **St Luke's Church, Temple Road, Cowley, Oxford OX4 2HT**
t 01865 398200
w **tinyurl.com/oxf-hist-cent**
The centre preserves registers for Berkshire parishes that are now in urban Oxford. Similarly Wallingford, now in Oxfordshire, was part of Berkshire until 1974.

Reading Local History Library
a **Reading Central Library, Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BQ**
t 0118 937 5950
w **tinyurl.com/reading-cent**
You can search a collection of thousands of historic images of Berkshire places, people and events via the catalogue at **reading.spydus.co.uk**. A new central library for Reading is due to open next year.

Royal Borough Of Windsor And Maidenhead Local Studies Team
a **Town Hall, St Ives Road, Maidenhead SL6 1RF**
t 01628 796969
e *local.studies@rbwm.gov.uk*
w **tinyurl.com/rbwm-local-stud**
This web page has information about the local-studies collections available in Maidenhead, Windsor and Ascot libraries.

Wiltshire And Swindon History Centre
a **Cocklebury Road, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 3QN**
t 01249 705500
e *heritageadmin@wiltshire.gov.uk*
w **wshc.org.uk**
The centre has some Bishops' Transcripts for Berkshire.

Windsor Library
a **Bachelors Acre, Windsor SL4 1ER**
t 01753 743940
e *local.studies@rbwm.gov.uk*
w **tinyurl.com/rbwm-windsor-lib**
The local-studies collection on the first floor contains electoral registers, photos, press cuttings, and the *Windsor & Eton Express* back to 1900 (on microfilm).

GROUPS & SOCIETIES

Berkshire Family History Society
w **berksfhs.org.uk**
The society runs several events a month, and holds advice sessions at local libraries. Members can access TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) via the society's website. Other benefits of joining include on-demand videos and workshops, an online newsletter and a quarterly journal.

Berkshire Local History Association
w **blha.org.uk**
Here you can find a list of member societies across the county, together with their contact emails and links to their websites.

MUSEUMS

Museum Of English Rural Life
a **University of Reading, Redlands Road, Reading RG1 5EX**
t 0118 378 8660
e *merl@reading.ac.uk*
w **merl.reading.ac.uk**
MERL holds material from individual farms, large estates, agricultural institutions, firms and organisations. You can search the museum's collections via its online catalogue Enterprise, located at **rdg.ent.sirsidynix.net.uk/client/en_GB/merl/**.

Reading Museum
a **Blagrave Street, Reading RG1 1QH**
t 0118 937 3400
w **readingmuseum.org.uk**
The museum traces its history back to a bequest from local collector Horatio Bland in 1883. You can explore holdings and highlights via **collections.readingmuseum.org.uk**.

The Rifles Berkshire And Wiltshire Museum
a **The Wardrobe, 58 The Close, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 2EX**
t 07304 068136
e *curator@thewardrobe.org.uk*
w **thewardrobe.org.uk**
The museum is being refurbished but plans to reopen in some form in late July, and offers a research service. You can explore its holdings at **thewardrobe.org.uk/collection**, and War Diaries from both world wars at **thewardrobe.org.uk/research/war-diaries**.

Windsor & Royal Borough Museum
a **The Guildhall, High Street, Windsor SL4 1LR**
t 01628 685686
e *museum@rbwm.gov.uk*
w **windsormuseum.org.uk**
You can view images and objects covering such topics as the military and armed forces, and working life and trade, at **windsormuseum.org.uk/our-collection/**.

WEBSITE

Ancestry
w **bit.ly/ancestry-berks**
Ancestry currently has more than 12 million electoral records, and a brand-new collection of parish registers is on the way too.

An estate account book, 1799–1800

Sophia Hall from Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Local Studies and Archives explains what an account book reveals about estate life at the end of the 18th century Interview By Rosemary Collins

Many of us have enjoyed a day out at one of Britain's country houses. They are both beautiful to look at, and fascinating landmarks to our history. Holland House, built in what was then countryside outside London and is now part of Kensington, was owned by some of Britain's most prominent families, making it a centre of social life for the upper classes for centuries until it was destroyed in the Blitz. Sophia Hall, archivist at Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Local Studies and Archives, shares an account book that records life at the house from a 'below stairs' perspective.

Can You Describe The Account Book?

The ledger details life on the Holland Estate in the late 1700s. Bound in vellum, and remarkably well preserved, the cover reads, "Garden, Pleasure Ground & Park Ledger – with annual abstracts of accounts, disbursements – 1799–1800."

Holland House, originally known as Cope Castle, was built in the early 17th century by Sir Walter Cope, who became chancellor of the exchequer. It was designed by John Thorpe, the architect of several baronial mansions that were erected in England during the period. Later, through the marriage of Sir Henry Rich, 1st Earl of Holland, to Cope's daughter, it came into the possession of the Rich family, the Earls of Warwick and Holland.

More marriages, deaths and wills led the Edwardes family to take up the lease, and by the time it was bought by Henry Fox, 1st Baron Holland, in 1768, many improvements and extensions had been made.

The book also tells the story of the ordinary people who worked the land

The 1st Baron Holland's son Charles James Fox (born 1749) was a Whig statesman. During his lifetime until his death in 1806, the cosmopolitan circle established by Lord and Lady Holland advocated political and religious liberty. The couple hosted salons and received leading European authors and politicians, advocating liberal politics and social reform both at home and abroad. According to the British Library, "The centre of exchange for this group was the dining room, where Elizabeth Vassall-Fox (Lady Holland) was chatelaine, hosting the leading figures of the day." The kitchen garden and estate would have supplied produce for these meetings and dinners, as well as selling it and supplying other aristocratic London houses.

Much of the house was destroyed in 1940 during the Blitz. Today, the house and its historic pleasure grounds sit in Holland Park and provide space for the community to enjoy sporting facilities, the Kyoto Garden, woodland walks, and children's play areas.

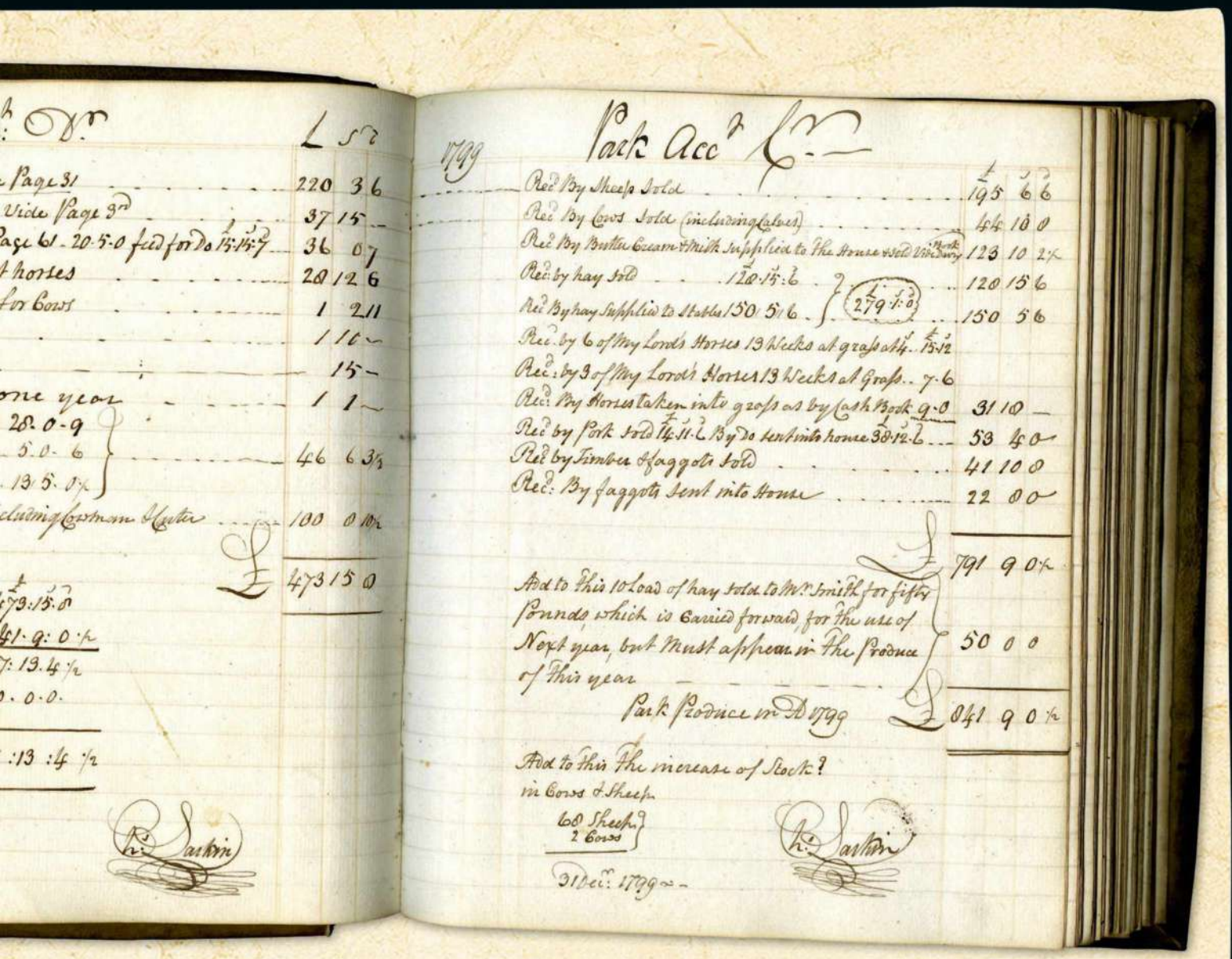
The account book details the costs linked to maintaining the pleasure grounds, livestock, kitchen garden, stables and staff. The ledger carefully records the number of store pigs –"porkers" – the meat supply for the house and the cost of grain to feed the other animals including sheep, cows, cart horses and Lord Holland's horses. Alongside these figures are the wages for staff, the cost of vegetable seeds for the garden, and income from selling produce grown on the estate.

Visit Us

Royal Borough Of Kensington And Chelsea Local Studies And Archives

a Kensington Central Library, 12 Phillimore Walk, London W8 7RX
t 020 7361 3038
e *archives@rbkc.gov.uk*
w **www.rbkc.gov.uk/libraries-0/libraries-and-room-hire/local-studies-and-archives**

The archive is open 1pm–5pm on Tuesdays and 10am–5pm on Wednesdays by appointment only. Appointments must be arranged in advance by email.



While fastidiously keeping track of all of the monetary figures, when detailing the accounts for the pleasure grounds the account-keeper is a little more creative and lists the produce of the pleasure grounds as "Health", and the produce of walkways as "Dry Feet".

What Does It Show About Life At Holland House?

Life at Holland House was extremely busy. The account book reveals not only the cost of running the estate, but also the number of people who were involved too. There were sheep, pigs, cows and horses to care for, a kitchen garden to tend, and many staff who kept the place running. The account book can be approached from many different angles depending on one's area of interest. Researchers who have requested access to the book have included people interested in historic agricultural practices, food historians researching the kitchen garden and the seasonal approach to growing and cooking, and family historians trying to trace a stable worker.

Why Did You Choose It?

At surface level, the account book tells the story of one of England's richest and most powerful families of the time. It highlights their privilege, the amount of land they owned and the fortune that it took to maintain it. However, if you dig a little deeper, the book also tells the story of the ordinary people who worked the land, tended the animals, and fed and kept the household running. In this way, the book captures the lives of people whose experiences were seldom chronicled in the 1700s.

For example, on the page recording the kitchen-garden accounts, there is an entry listing "Larkin's annual wages as Gardener", plus the tools and seeds needed to complete the job. Further accounts list the wages, and sometimes names, of cowherders, stable hands and day labourers.

What Other Documents Does The Archive Hold?

In addition to council records such as electoral registers, council minutes, artworks, photographs, architectural histories, rate books and parish records, we also hold a variety of community collections. This material helps to tell the story of those who have called the borough home, in their own words.

Collections include oral histories from the postwar Windrush Generation and Irish and Spanish communities linked to North Kensington, civilian records during the Second World War, and individual personal histories throughout the decades, and we aim to put local people at the heart of collection development. So we've built community partnerships while developing the council's first ever LGBTQ+ Collection, and are developing with the community a North Kensington Social Justice Archive capturing 150 years of local campaigning.

REVIEWS

The latest books on history and genealogy, plus three recommended podcasts

MEMORIAL INSCRIPTIONS

Using Gravestones To Trace Your Ancestors
A Guide For Family Historians

Amanda Leedham
Pen & Sword, 176 pages, £14.99

Pen & Sword has now published more than 100 guides and handbooks for family historians, a remarkable achievement, and there's no sign that the series is coming to an end. This latest book, on using gravestones in family history, focuses on one of the most important potential physical reminders of our forebears, seeking to explain what lies behind the inscriptions and the carved decorations. Amanda Leedham draws on her own extensive experience of researching gravestones, particularly in and around the city of Leicester and in parts of Norfolk, so a fair bit of the book is about her personal findings and genealogical journey.

The title is somewhat misleading. A good deal of the content is not about gravestones, but is about more general aspects of death and burial, and ways of researching specific cases in, for example, newspapers. Sometimes this discussion goes off on tangents, or has over-long detours not directly relevant to the subject. There are also some basic editing errors, such as "grizzly" instead of "grisly", "affect" instead of "effect", and sentences such as "William Guard went to sea as boy in April 1840" (sic). I also feel that the style is sometimes too chatty for me.

A more serious concern is that there is very little about regional differences in the style, materials, design and content of gravestones in Britain – for instance, the superb Welsh-language slate gravestones that are found in Gwynedd churchyards – and not enough about the simple fact that most people did not have gravestones.

I was also surprised to see so little about the tremendous number of memorial-inscription transcription projects that have been carried out over the past 50 years.

Alan Crosby lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*. He also writes a regular column for *WDYTYA? Magazine*

Three gravestones. Clockwise from top left: a Royal Navy lieutenant in St Mary de Castro's churchyard, Leicester; a missing wife in All Saints' churchyard, Leicester; and a religious scene in St Mary's churchyard, Snettisham, Norfolk

AMANDA LEEDHAM/PEN & SWORD

FAMILY HISTORY PODCASTS

Three of the best history and family history podcasts we've listened to recently

Human Resources

Podcast services

In this podcast, which ran between 2021 and 2023, journalist Moya Lothian-McLean explores the role of slavery in the history of both her family and that of the UK, tracing its impact on everything from country houses to major cities.

Speaking With Shadows

english-heritage.org.uk/speakingwithshadows

This podcast from English Heritage explores the stories of some of the ordinary people who are connected to the historic sites in the organisation's care. Recent episodes include *The Polish Special Forces Soldiers of Audley End*, a 17th-century country house near Saffron Walden, Essex, and *The Patients of Chiswick House Asylum* in London which first opened its doors in 1892.

Absolute Units

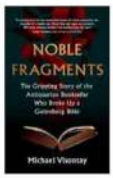
merl.reading.ac.uk/explore/absolute-units/

On 9 April 2018, the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) at the University of Reading shared a photo of a giant ram on Twitter with the comment "look at this absolute unit". It went viral, and since then the museum has become famous for its irreverent but very informative online content. Now MERL has launched a podcast, which it describes as "exploring the fascinating, surprising and moving backstories of our collections, to tell the story of the English countryside".

SOCIAL HISTORY

Noble Fragments The Gripping Story Of The Antiquarian Bookseller Who Broke Up A Gutenberg Bible

Michael Visontay
Scribe, 266 pages, £16.99



In 1921 Gabriel Wells – a wealthy US dealer in antique books who had been born Gábor Weisz to a Hungarian Jewish family – bought a Gutenberg Bible, one of the rarest and most valuable books in existence, and broke it up into leaves, or collections of pages, known as the 'Noble Fragments'.

Australian journalist Michael Visontay's father and grandparents were also Hungarian Jews, who like thousands of others were deported to the concentration camps in the Holocaust. Visontay's father and grandfather survived, but his grandmother was killed at Auschwitz. After the Second World War, his grandfather remarried, to Wells' niece. This family connection inspired Visontay to write this book, telling the story of both his family and the fate of the Noble Fragments.

Unfortunately, the two halves of the book aren't equal in interest. Visontay's account of his family's ordeal in the Holocaust and how they rebuilt their lives as immigrants in Australia is poignant and historically important. In contrast, although the story of the Noble Fragments and how they became sought-after prizes for rare-book collectors is mildly interesting, it tends to sink into a repetitive account of the leaves changing hands between wealthy purchasers for lots of money.

Rosemary Colins **is the features editor of *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine***

Reader Review YOUR CHANCE TO ASSESS THE LATEST BOOKS

SOCIAL HISTORY

Listen In How Radio Changed The Home

Beaty Rubens
Bodleian Library, 272 pages, £30

This compelling read, covering the early history of radio in Britain, reminds us of the lifeline that the 'wireless' was for millions. It transported me back to my 85-year-old grandfather's front room during Christmas 1973. So disabled by arthritis was Granddad that he rarely went out – the radio was his constant companion. He asked me to listen to the Queen's Speech with him. He insisted on wearing a jacket and tie and standing up for Her Majesty, wobbling precariously, supported by two flimsy-looking sticks.

The book's chronological flow highlights the major events that radio brought alive – into people's homes. Beautifully written and peppered with humorous anecdotes, such as the BBC director-general John Reith's insistence that evening announcers were formally dressed, *Listen In* held my attention throughout. I loved the extracts from listeners' letters and had forgotten that in the days before social media, regular programming was often interrupted by urgent messages.

A family hear the results of the 1923 general election

Filled with excellently reproduced images (I was fascinated to see that people wore earphones from the earliest days of radio), this book is highly recommended.

Jill Ritchie, East Grinstead
Jill is researching her father's life after finding out about a half-sister from his first marriage

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TV & RADIO

Jonathan Wright previews upcoming programmes on history and family history

DNA Journey With Ancestry

ITV1 and ITVX
June

Fay Ripley *(left)* and Hermione Norris appear in an upcoming episode of *DNA Journey*

Following on from a trio of new episodes late last year, *DNA Journey* is back. For anyone yet to catch the programme, the format is that two celebrity friends team up to research their respective family trees, aided by taking DNA tests and good old-fashioned rummaging around in the archives.

The latest run begins with Sam Thompson, who first found fame on *Made in Chelsea*, and Marvin Humes, TV presenter and member of the band JLS, heading into the past. The duo became best friends after meeting on *I'm A Celebrity… Get Me Out Of Here!*, but they hail from different worlds. Thompson's full surname is, somewhat to his own embarrassment, de Courcy Thompson, but is he necessarily as posh as he thinks he is? Meanwhile his pal Humes is a South Londoner with a mixed heritage, whose grandparents came to the UK as part of the Windrush Generation. Humes' inspirational great grandmother, he discovers, proves to be key to this story.

Actors Fay Ripley and Hermione Norris have been friends since they were both cast in the comedy-drama series *Cold Feet* in the late 1990s. Ripley, we learn, is not as northern as her image suggests. In fact, she's southern and from a well-to-do background. Her research uncovers a royal connection, a forebear who owned an internationally famous dance theatre, and – via a trip to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London – deep connections to the world of acting. As for Norris, her great great grandmother Josefina turns out to have been something of a hero. After arriving in Soho from Sweden, she supported her entire family by working as a dressmaker.

Finally, the episode featuring comedians Julian Clary and Jo Brand promises to be full of good-natured sniping. Clary's journey into the past encompasses a copper who patrolled London's Docklands when Jack the Ripper was on the loose, a meeting with a famous cousin, and a connection to his hero, Oscar Wilde. Brand, meanwhile, learns about an ancestor who, like herself, worked as a mental-health nurse. She also travels to Ireland to research the early life of her grandmother Helen – and the family that Helen left behind.

All previous episodes of *DNA Journey* are available to stream via ITVX.

Titanic: Our Secret Histories

Channel 4
Now streaming

Oceanographer Robert Ballard discovered the wreck of RMS *Titanic* in 1985. Since then our collective fascination with the great liner has, if anything, grown, alongside our interest in those who were aboard when *Titanic* hit an iceberg in the Atlantic.

This one-off documentary puts the passengers and crew at the centre of the story as it traces the impact of the disaster on families across the world. There's a strong genealogy theme as living descendants learn about the experiences of their relatives, in a programme that presents shocking details and tragic tales that should be better known.

Outrageous

U&Drama and streaming
Thursday 19 June

Glamorous, aristocratic and clever, the Mitfords were the brightest of bright young things, six unconventional sisters who came of age between the wars. Created by Sarah Williams, who adapted Andrea Levy's 2004 novel *Small Island* for TV, and based on Mary Lovell's 2001 biography *The Mitford Girls*, *Outrageous* dramatises their collective story in the 1930s across six episodes.

This was a tumultuous decade for the Mitfords, not helped by the family contending with financial issues. One of the sisters, Diana, was divorced in an era when this was considered shocking – and subsequently married Oswald Mosley, infamous founder of the British Union of Fascists. Another sister, Unity, was fixated on Adolf Hitler. The left-wing politics of their sibling Jessica could hardly have been more different.

Bessie Carter *(Bridgerton)* leads the cast as Nancy, whose semi-autobiographical novels *The Pursuit Of Love* (1945) and *Love in a Cold Climate* (1949) offered her own take on the Mitfords' lives. And if you want to know more, Channel 4 has recently commissioned a documentary series about the sisters.

Archive On 4: We Were The Mods

BBC Radio 4 and BBC Sounds
Saturday 21 June

The Who's 1973 concept album *Quadrophenia* told the story of a young mod, Jimmy. Six years later it became a movie, starring Phil Daniels, Leslie Ash and Ray Winstone. With a ballet version of the story in the works, music critic Alexis Petridis investigates why *Quadrophenia* still resonates.

Secret Nazi Bases

U&Yesterday and streaming
Tuesday 24 June

If you visit the Continent you can still find crumbling remains of bunkers and fortified bases that were built by the Nazis. This returning documentary series follows experts as they seek out these sites. The first two episodes take in a canal in East Prussia and tunnels beneath castles.

ITV

NEXT MONTH

Our August issue goes on sale on **Tuesday 15 July**

TIPS FROM THE SHOW

The genealogist behind dozens of *Who Do You Think You Are?* episodes shares what she has learnt over the years

PLUS

- Oxfordshire Records
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- Find More Obituaries

DOODLEBUG HORROR

How London survived bombardment, and the records you can use to research WW2 victims

'Ernest Will Not Be Forgotten'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Sue Harper's great uncle served on HMS *Pathfinder*, which made maritime history in the First World War. His memory lives on in her new novel, says **Gail Dixon**

The *Nottingham Evening Post* ran this photo when Ernest died

On 5 September 1914, HMS *Pathfinder* was cruising off St Abb's Head in Berwickshire, Scotland. Stalking its course was the German submarine U-21, which opened fire at around 3.50pm. *Pathfinder* tragically became the first warship to be sunk by a self-propelled torpedo fired by a U-boat.

Among the crew was 18-year-old Ernest Rockley, the great uncle of Sue Harper.

"Ernest was born in Leicester in 1896, the eldest son of working-class couple Joseph and Hannah Rockley," explains Sue who lives on Hayling Island, Hampshire.

"The family later moved to Sherwood, Nottingham, the city where I grew up. Joseph was a carpenter by trade, but became a coal miner and sadly lost a leg in a pit accident." Hannah worked as a laundress, an accoucheur (a person who assists during childbirth) and a layer-out of corpses. She was also rumoured to be a back-street abortionist.

"My grandfather Frank 'Chum' Rockley and great aunts Minnie and Ethel told me about Ernest," Sue says. "He was a willing lad with keen ambitions to escape the family's poverty."

Ernest attended Carrington Council School, Nottingham, and in 1911 was employed as a grocer's assistant. "He was shabbily dressed, like the rest of the family at that time. They were too poor to provide enough food, so he was small for his age."

Ernest had a strong sense of patriotism and in 1912 he enlisted in the Royal Navy, making remarkable progress. He learned to swim, grew taller and improved his handwriting.

He moved quickly up the ranks from boy second class to ordinary seaman. Ernest served on a number of vessels before joining the scout cruiser *Pathfinder*, which had been built by Cammell Laird in Birkenhead, Cheshire, and launched on 16 July 1904.

The torpedo slammed into *Pathfinder* and caused a massive explosion

On 5 September 1914, the warship was short of coal and making a speed of only 5 knots. Despite knowing that U-boats were on the prowl, its captain Francis Martin-Leake ordered his escort and torpedo boats to dock making *Pathfinder* an easy target.

A look-out spotted the wake of the torpedo, and the officer of the watch ordered evasive action. It was too late, however, and the torpedo slammed into *Pathfinder* igniting its magazine. This caused a massive explosion.

The ship sank before there was time to launch the lifeboats. Only 18 crew members survived, and it's believed that 261 men perished. "I read about the sinking and thought what an awful death it must have been, and what a waste. Ernest's body was never found, and it's hard to think of him being down there in the North Sea. His name is commemorated on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Chatham Naval Memorial in Kent.

"It's impossible to overestimate the impact Ernest's death had on the Rockleys – they were baffled and angry. Joseph said, 'I wouldn't have cared if he'd died fighting, but this isn't fair fighting.' The family always spoke of him in the present tense."

Ernest's memory lives on in Sue's powerful novel *Blood and Coal: The Story of a Nottingham Mining Family* (DB Publishing, 2024), which she researched with the support of genealogist Carol Bannister. This unusual combination of fiction and fact includes imagined conversations between her relations to give them back their own voices. She imagines Ernest reflecting on his short life and saying, "Duty was the only bride I ever had."

"I've thought about Ernest a lot. I could have known him, had he not died so young. He might have been puzzled by me, or been proud of me. Who can tell?"

SUE HARPER is an emeritus professor of film history at the University of Portsmouth

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You can buy *Blood and Coal* from Amazon (ebook £6.99, paperback £9.19)

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